



PERCY PITT

[Photo: Herbert Lambert, bath]

PERCY PITT

of Covent Garden and the B.B.C.

By

J. DANIEL CHAMIER

With an Introduction by

SIR HENRY J. WOOD



LONDON

EDWARD ARNOLD & CO.

By the same Author

FABULOUS MONSTER :

A life of the Ex-Kaiser

15s. net

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BUTLER AND TANNER LTD. PROME AND LONDON

THE BOOK THAT PERCY PITT BEGAN
TO WRITE WAS TO HAVE BEEN
DEDICATED TO HIS WIFE AND STEPSON.
FATE DECREED THAT THE BOOK WHICH
HAS ACTUALLY BEEN WRITTEN SHOULD
BE DEDICATED BY THEM
TO HIS MEMORY.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It would be downright dishonest in me not to acknowledge, with many thanks, that all the real work in connection with this book has been done by Miss Chamier and Miss Beaufile.

J. DANIEL CHAMIER.

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INTRODUCTION

BY SIR HENRY J. WOOD

Percy Pitt was a splendid friend and colleague, a fine, highly trained, serious musician and a distinguished composer, in his day a modern composer.

We met first in that bygone age in which antiquarians have lately begun to take an interest, in the early nineties. It was in the office of Schulz-Curtius in Piccadilly Circus, and the moment was an important one for me. I had just been engaged to do work I loved, because it was on behalf of a series of symphony concerts which Schulz-Curtius had started at Queen's Hall and at which he introduced to London the great Wagnerian conductors of Bayreuth—Levi, Strauss and Mottl. I had to look after and prepare the orchestral material for these concerts, letter the band parts, mark the starting places, insert the concert finishes for the various excerpts from the *Ring* (I use those concert finishes still), rehearse the four Wagner tubas (how the technique of tuba players has improved since that day!) and do a thousand other minor, necessary jobs. I remember that I had to teach a tenor trombone player to play the bass trumpet and to go to Brussels to see Mahillon and get new instruments made. In all this work, exciting and absorbing because of our enthusiasm for the concerts, Percy Pitt was my helper, and he is thus

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connected with the very earliest work I did for orchestral music in Queen's Hall. I can remember the pride that mingled with our joy when Percy and I heard Mottl direct the *Trauermarsch* in Queen's Hall with noble dignity, breadth and grandeur. We were exactly the same age and almost from our first meeting we were great friends.

Soon afterwards Robert Newman started the Proms and I was conducting an orchestra in Queen's Hall myself. Lane Wilson was our accompanist, but he threw up the job at the end of our first season and it occurred to me that Percy was the very man to succeed him. I wired to him and we lunched together at Pagani's and talked the matter over. Percy was keen but a little diffident because he knew that he was not a fluent organist. But I wanted to have his fine musicianship and his enthusiasm behind me. 'I'll pull you through,' I told him, and straight away I took him to call on the alert and clever Robert Newman. Newman drew me aside. 'Have you ever heard Pitt accompany?' he asked. 'Yes,' I answered. 'Have you heard him play the organ?' 'Yes,' I said again. 'It's a bit of a risk,' said Newman. But Newman had the courage to take risks—he had shown that when he had engaged me as conductor a year earlier—and he had also that very rare magnanimity which enabled him to give way to other men. 'You are my musical boss,' he said. 'I leave purely musical matters to you.'

So Percy Pitt became accompanist, organist and solo celesta player at our Promenade, Symphony and Sunday Afternoon Concerts. He very soon showed Newman and everyone else that he was a particularly

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gifted accompanist and by dint of hard work and determination he became an entirely adequate organist. Many a time we met in the organ loft in Queen's Hall, to arrange organ registration and so forth, two hours before the band turned up for rehearsal at ten in the morning. I have always been fidgety about my organ parts.

As far as I myself and our concerts were concerned, I was very sorry indeed when Pitt's work at Covent Garden obliged him to give up his connection with us. Apart from the great value of his contribution to the concerts, I liked making music with him ; he was a delightful musical companion. But we could not ask him to stay with us, for it was impossible not to see that he was the very man who was wanted as musical adviser at Covent Garden. His unusual linguistic talent—he could speak and write French, German and Italian easily and correctly—and the sure touch with which he could cast an opera, the knack he had of naming just the right voice and actor to interpret a part in a work, whether Italian, German or French, marked him out for the post he filled so well. He was so busy in it that for a number of years we did not see much of each other.

Just nine years ago we came together again. He was then musical director of the B.B.C. and there was a question of my working with that organization. Exactly as in the old days, Percy and I had several luncheons together at Pagani's, and their upshot was that I decided to continue to conduct the Promenade Concerts for which the B.B.C. had, with customary public spirit, agreed to become responsible. The recent death of that unique and very great concert

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manager, Robert Newman, had made me feel for the moment that I could hardly go on with the Proms. The Proms were Newman's creation and he was part of them ; it was difficult to contemplate the Proms without him. But Percy persuaded me not to give them up.

I had the pleasure and privilege of producing everything he composed from 1896 onwards, except his *Sinfonietta* which he wrote at the suggestion of his great friend, Dr. Hans Richter, and which was performed at the Birmingham Festival directed by him in October 1906. He wrote many charming songs to French and English words for my wife, Olga Ourousoff, whom he coached not only in these but also in many other songs. He and she were great musical pals.

Percy Pitt's death was a very real loss, both to his many friends and to music in England.

HENRY WOOD.

49 HALLAM STREET,
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PERCY PITT

CHAPTER I

The Child

Percy Pitt was to be a lawyer.

George Pitt had not made a fortune by the law ; but he had made a living with propriety and modest success. He had married a wife—Edwina Hone her name was—and they were settled in sufficient comfort and security when their only son was born on January 4, 1869. For ten years he was the only child in the grey house in Charlotte Street, Islington. That such a solitary treasure may go through life gloriously is the proud hope and the secret expectation of most parents ; that he shall go through life safely is the stronger anxiety of almost all. The law had proved itself a steady friend ; and no one can deny that it may lead to some of the very highest positions in the State. The family had brains : did it not claim descent from the two great Georgian statesmen ? George and Edwina Pitt saw no reason why their little prodigy, if the solicitor's office did not give him scope enough, should not re-gild the once great name at the Bar.

The little black-haired, brown-eyed brat was in no hurry to disturb their dreams ; he was too busy studying orchestration.

He was delicate, or they thought so—only sons are generally delicate. He did not play games much, at school or elsewhere ; when his little sister Gertrude arrived to complete the family, he was too big a boy to find her a playmate. His playing was on the piano, and his parents were proud of it, although they would never have allowed it to encroach upon the proper business of life, upon lessons, walks, and meals. The piano stood behind Percy's chair in the dining-room ; when his father and mother, who had not got to go to school, were late for breakfast, he would twist round and play softly, returning to his legitimate occupation at the first distant sound of a door. Mr. Fountain Meen, an excellent pianist and organist, gave him music lessons ; sometimes out of the books of drawing-room melodies, Cramer's and Bertini's, but sometimes much more wonderful things from magicians like Haydn, Beethoven, and Mozart.

'I don't know that I was particularly musical as a small child,' Percy Pitt thought afterwards, 'although my doting parents would have staked their very existence on it.' It was natural that he should think so. To be entirely preoccupied with music was his idea of a normal existence ; to be 'particularly musical,' in his opinion, would have been to give the most precocious manifestations.

The parents, 'in spite of their ingrained and old-fashioned idea, that Art should be looked upon as an agreeable pastime, but could not be regarded as a safe or even reputable way of earning one's living,' were not entirely without musical leanings ; for though they did not go to concerts, they went more often to the opera than to the theatre ; and Percy

Pitt was a very small boy indeed when he first saw the inside of Covent Garden. Now a taste for opera is comparatively rare in England, and the opportunity of gratifying it expensive ; so that there was something high and glamorous about these expeditions which was one of the strongest of his early impressions.

Opera in England was, and still is, in rather a peculiar position. For people like the Pitts, ordinarily not very musical, bored by concerts, there was perhaps a tinge of æsthetic snobbery in their liking for it, a feeling that they could appreciate high art. But the snobbery in very musical circles was all the other way. By the lovers of 'pure' music, opera was regarded as contaminated by its dramatic and scenic elements. Not that the music itself was necessarily inferior ; some of the greatest composers had written operas. But the very presence of those elements which were capable of attracting the not-very-musical, of pleasing the people who could not sit through a symphony, was enough to repel the musical highbrows : since if you enjoyed opera, you might be suspected of enjoying the story or the scenery or something else which was not music. What 'everybody' can enjoy is always rejected by the best people.

In these circumstances, it might seem that opera was destined to be a heaven-sent means of giving music to the million, of leading those who did not especially care about music to know and love it. And that was, in fact, how it had begun its career. In the days of Rich's old theatre in Lincoln's Inn, where the *Beggar's Opera* 'made Rich gay and Gay rich,' and of the first and second Covent Garden Theatres, which

were respectively burnt down in 1809 and 1856, opera long rubbed shoulders with stage-plays, ballets, and variety shows. An opera would figure on one of those old play-bills—whose print now looks so cramped and ugly to eyes accustomed to artistry in posters—followed by a farce, ‘a good tricking, shifting after-piece, and a figure-dance, and a horn-pipe, and a song between the acts.’ In such surroundings not only Arne’s native operas were produced, and Attwood’s and Bishop’s, but also adaptations and translations of foreign masterpieces like Mozart’s *Figaro* and Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. Opera was in those days a lively enough native growth, but within characteristic limits. Arne’s *Artaxerxes* was composed ‘in the Italian manner,’ that is, the dialogue was sung instead of spoken; but though it went well enough it was not the type the public liked.

The English public preferred its dialogue spoken. It was prepared to have music in the shape of duets and love-songs, and marches and choruses, and ballads and ‘glees,’ apparently feeling that these did not strain probability too far. People do sing serenades when they are in love, or choruses when they are feeling jolly, or drinking songs when they have had something to drink. But there was something which conflicted with English ideas of common sense in the spectacle of personages shouting their secrets and their woes at the full pitch of powerful voices, and dying with a wonderful control of the diaphragm. These half-measures, however, offended those more cultured persons who admired Italian opera, and they accordingly came to the rescue with an attempt to transplant the foreign method.

THE CHILD

By the time Percy Pitt began going to hear it, opera in England had been almost killed by its friends. In 1847 Gruneisen established Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden, and in three years his backer had lost £60,000 and had gone bankrupt. Nevertheless, the enterprise was taken over in 1851 by Frederick Gye, who had been associated with the management of Vauxhall Gardens and had also supplied Covent Garden with soap and candles and other necessities for the artists' dressing-rooms. From that time onwards Gye at Covent Garden, and Mapleson at the Haymarket or Drury Lane, struggled in rivalry, and under the shadow of impending ruin, to give London 'Grand Opera.' The general population of London had from the first received it with hostility and ridicule, and nicknamed its earliest exponents, from their conductor, 'Costa-mongers'; but in any case the general population of London could not have gone to Covent Garden if it had wanted to. The theatre had many more private boxes than at present; only a small section of the pit was open to the public—on occasions when it was not wanted by the subscribers—and evening dress was *de rigueur*. Opera, in fact, had become fashionable and exclusive.

It was natural that the great works produced abroad should be heard in England, and they were undoubtedly best sung in the language in which they were written; but they could not be enjoyed by the mass of the nation on those terms; and they were forced to depend on their *cachet* in the fashionable world. Their exclusiveness grew by what it fed on: the less the ordinary folk could enjoy it, and the more rigidly aristocratic it was, the better society liked it.

The foreign languages sung, far from repelling a well-educated audience in the early nineteenth century, added to its attraction. The highly cultured enjoyed them, from association with foreign places and literature ; the well-educated piqued themselves on their culture in understanding them ; the less well-educated would not for the world be thought to want them translated. Such an audience, although it was quite ready to go wild over a particular singer, would put up with no nonsense about listening to the music if it preferred to talk. A place for wearing all one's diamonds, and meeting all one's friends : that was what Covent Garden represented to the fine society of the time ; and to the small opera-loving bourgeois, an occasional desperate extravagance or a long test of endurance outside the gallery door.

It was at Covent Garden, at nine years old or so, that Percy Pitt made his first terrifying acquaintance with *Lohengrin*. Albani was singing ; but that did not affect him very much. Gilbert and Sullivan had been all very well ; but he was ' nearly paralysed with fright ' by the way in which the wicked Count—with his equally wicked Countess—lurked and mouthed around the castle walls, and then, in a still more horrible manner, burst in at the head of four other villains to interrupt the song of the beautiful bridal pair. Percy was not so small as to think they were real assassins. But they were ugly in words and deeds ; and besides, he wanted to listen to the band.

To Mr. and Mrs. Pitt opera no doubt presented itself chiefly as a rather more fantastic sort of play. They did not realize how completely, for their little son, it represented his innocent ideal, life set to

music. That was just how things ought to be ! A passionate and growing curiosity possessed him to know how the orchestra did it—how they managed to play all sorts of different notes in order to produce a whole which was sometimes ravishing and sometimes odd with an oddness which was not the same as being out of tune. He grew in years and in preoccupation with the question. He bought a primer on the subject, and read it under his desk in school. But harmony is difficult for an unaided schoolboy. Perhaps it would help to have an orchestral score ? Percy saved up, and bought a set of orchestral parts for one of Waldteufel's better-known waltzes, which had appealed to him orchestrally.

From these [he wrote later] I copied out a crude sort of full-score, but only to be baulked again, for although I was naturally on more or less familiar terms with the clefs used in the notation of music for the piano, the appearance of viola parts written in the alto clef, and of transposing instruments such as clarinets, horns, and cornets, distressed me very much. Sometimes, too, I came across another signature—the tenor clef—which was equally unintelligible to me, suddenly appearing in bassoon and violoncello parts ; and this almost drove me to distraction !

These struggles were not only unaided, but unlicensed. Percy's wish to study the theory of music was firmly discountenanced. Perhaps the parents thought that it would distract his attention from his school-work—unaware that it already did ; perhaps also they were beginning to be a little uneasy about this bent of his, and thought, in the calm untroubled

manner of pre-Freudian parents, that the proper and effective treatment for a bent was vigorously to bend it straight again. Gratifying though it was that their son should be a musical prodigy in his spare time, it would be too much of a good thing altogether if he wanted to 'take it up.' It was characteristic of their time and place that they liked the idea of having an artist in the family little better than the idea of having a hopelessly bad hat in it, or a mental defective. The attitude was partly puritan, arising historically from the feeling that the graces of life are at worst spiritual snares and at best trifles, and partly practical, based on the indisputable observation that art as a rule does not pay. And, without being sordid, a man must be an artist himself if he is to encourage his children to think the world well lost for art. So, though Percy was allowed to learn the piano, which is an elegant accomplishment and useful in even the most serious walks of life—as for instance in playing hymns—he was not allowed to learn theory, which is a waste of time for any but professional musicians. His parents no more thought of letting him study composition, because he said he wanted to be a composer, than the parents of other small boys set about teaching them the habits of boilers, because they said they wanted to be engine-drivers.

We hear fearful things nowadays about the results of thwarting one's children. Young Percy, according to the handbooks, might seem doomed to develop a stutter, or a phobia, or at least some mental kink for life, in consequence of these ill-judged refusals. The thwarting, however, had not as yet gone very far or very deep ; for although his parents regarded him as



PERCY PITT AS A BOY



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a boy being bred up for a lawyer, he was actually living very much like a boy being bred up for a musician. For the moment, he only developed a rage for composition. Orchestral work had defeated him for the moment ; so the opus took the form of a gavotte for the piano.

It made a sensation in the family. There was no objection even to its being published : after a friend had put it to rights a little. It was followed by an arrangement for a military band, which was really played by a band at the seaside. Then there was another piano-piece ; and perhaps there would have been more, but that—by a pure coincidence, naturally—the publishers went bankrupt.

These signs of genius only confirmed the parents' resolution that it should not be wasted upon the ephemeral pursuits of art. The boy was twelve. It was time he went abroad, to acquire the knowledge of French and German which would be so useful in the legal profession.

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CHAPTER II

The Scholar Abroad

In 1882, on a dark and cold winter's morning, the small Pitt was put into the train at Victoria for his first unattended Continental journey, to arrive in Paris and be received into a totally strange school, the Lycée J. B. Say. The dismal journey led to a pleasant end. The head-master, whose name was not J. B. Say but Ernest Coutant, was 'a rabid musical enthusiast,' and gave a fellow-fanatic the run of his library and—at reasonable hours—of his piano ; and the Swiss music-master was a distinguished musician, M. Mathis Lussy, who not only taught young Pitt the piano but opened his mind 'to aspects of music which had hitherto been a sealed book' to him. It was in Paris, too, that he first heard any serious concert music. These two kind teachers, and his parents' friends in Paris, gave tickets for concerts, the most regular of which were the Sunday Concerts of the Société du Conservatoire. There were visits, too, to the Opéra Comique. Perhaps it was thought that 'Grand Opera' would be above the youngster's head, perhaps he himself, recollecting *Lohengrin*, was not at first anxious to renew the acquaintance ; in any case, it was only light opera to which he was taken, but that was paradise enough to a young and untrained taste. And if some of it went in at one ear and out at the other, the pathetic charm of Masse-

net's *Manon*, and the sensuous grace of Delibes' *Lakmé*, remained as 'unforgettable experiences.'

Sometimes also he went to the theatre, to the Comédie Française, which was very good for his French. Indeed, for all his absorption in music, he never had one of those 'temperaments' which make people fit for nothing but what they particularly like, and his school lessons gave him little trouble. He was too sweet-tempered and sociable a youngster to live in revolt against his world; and he had inherited a strong dash of the stout bourgeois common sense, which made it easy for him to deal with the practical side of his existence.

After two happy years, in consequence, he had made highly satisfactory progress in the French tongue; and what he was doing in the department of music was of no importance. It was time to consider German.

He returned to London for a holiday; and just then *Parsifal* was being given at the Albert Hall, concert-wise. It was all quite first-class: some of the original singers from Bayreuth, Mr. Joseph Barnby conducting. The boy of fifteen had to exert some determination in order to hear it. He went without his lunch; waited for hours queued up in the winter street; climbed hungry and cold to the gallery, and expected the thrill of stage opera. But even grown-ups sometimes find in concert-opera an element of disillusion. Such a feeling inspired a comical account by a critic of a much later Wagner concert.

It takes a little time to get used to the arrangement under which all the performers sit in a long row in the front of the platform like so many Christy minstrels. In moments when the attention nods, it would

hardly surprise us to hear a dialogue between, say, Mr. Whitehill and Mr. Austin, on Moore and Burgess lines :

‘ Massa Wotan, can you tole me who stole dat ring ? ’

‘ No, Massa Alberich, I cannot tole you who stole dat ring.’

‘ What, Massa Wotan, you can’t tole me who stole dat ring ? ’

‘ No, Massa Alberich, I can’t tole you who stole dat ring.’

‘ Well, Massa Wotan, if you don’t know——’ etc.

Even without this the performance [so the critic continued] has its humours. It did one good to see Hunding, after quarrelling with Siegmund in the first act, sitting comfortably in the balcony for the greater part of the second act with Wotan’s wife, and conscientiously slipping back a few minutes before the end in order to have his fight with Siegmund and to be slain by Wotan. It reminded one of the old German mystery play of the Creation, in which Adam was seen walking across the stage to be created. Few men have faced death with so light a heart as Mr. Radford did to-day.’

And this instead of that other world, that magic world, which exists behind the curtain ! instead of the fairy figures of romance, alive and real for an hour ! The writer who laughed about Hunding and Wotan had learnt to love the strange music and to understand the foreign words, and really liked them just as well or better without the theatre. To Percy the vacuum was quite as keenly felt as the one his lunch had not filled. He stayed to the end—but it was nearly as bad as Telramund.

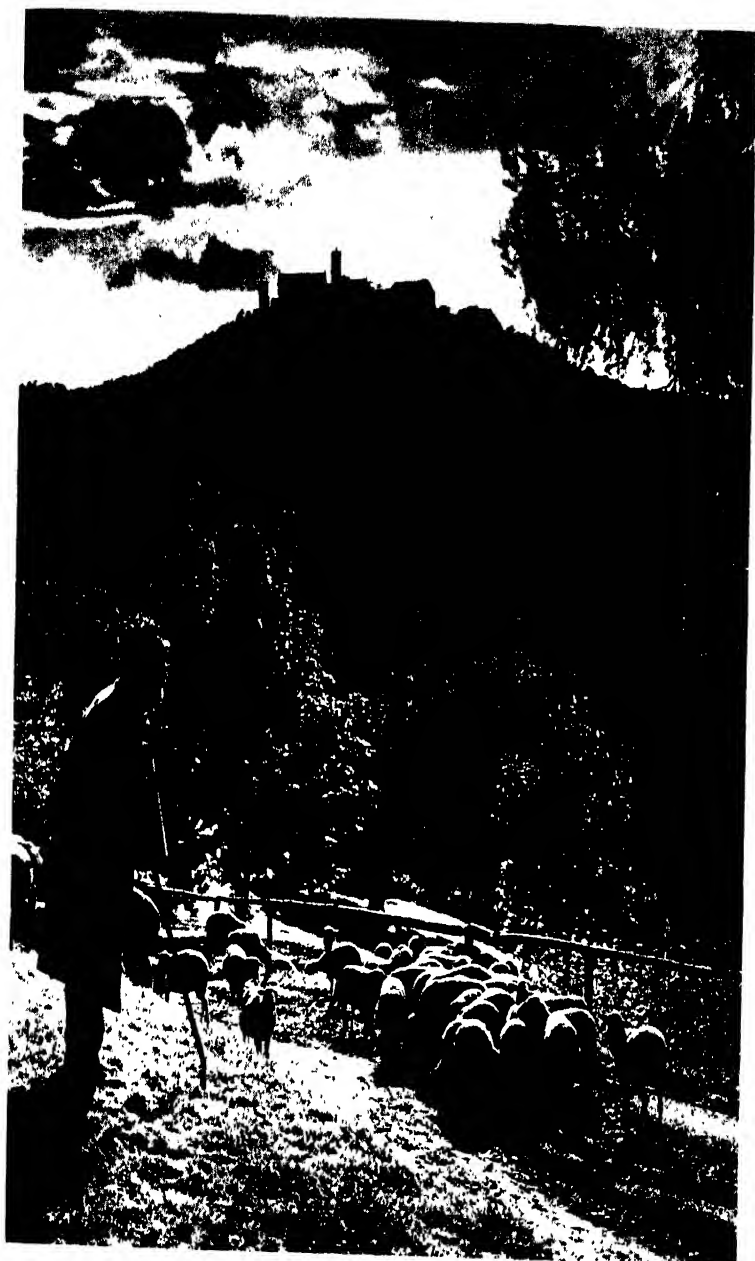
And so to Eisenach, where at any rate one might learn to understand Wagner’s words.

It was curious that, after revelling in music in France, Percy Pitt's first impression of Germany was of a musically barren land. Once more he set out into the unknown, conducting, 'on the principle of the blind leading the blind,' a youth of his own age and equally unacquainted with the language ; once more happiness, if not of quite the right sort, was at the end of the journey. Little Eisenach in the Thuringian Forest was one of the loveliest places possible, and not entirely unconnected with music either. The little town itself, whose massive old gate admitted to narrow twisting streets, mediævally planned with mediæval houses overhanging their stony ways, was actually the birthplace of Bach. The glorious wooded mountains were the scene of *Tannhäuser*. It was the Landgrave of Thuringia who held the Tournaments of Song in the eleventh-century Wartburg—still towering on its height above the town, and associated with religious stories which perhaps influenced the composer's mind ; it was there that Saint Elisabeth told her white lie, and that Martin Luther threw his inkpot at the Devil. The story is sometimes doubted, but the inkstain is to be seen. In the heart of the Hörselberg was the Grotto of Venus. On the hillside above the town was a Wagner museum. There were interesting places too within reach : lovely Gotha, learned Jena : Meiningen—a wonderful orchestra there : Armstadt—Bach again : Weimar, where Liszt lived and where *Lohengrin* was first performed. A fellow called Goethe, as a matter of fact, lived and was even buried at Weimar ; but he never wrote any music. And then there was Ruhla—and here Percy Pitt's blood was stirred by somewhat more earthly con-

siderations ; for he was already a heavy smoker, and Ruhla was a centre of the meerschaum-pipe industry.

Amid these beauties the youth remained for nine months, boarding with a member of the teaching staff of the *gymnasium* which he attended, and enduring frightful hardships. Professor Balzer was a learned scholar, but he had no music in his composition, and, worse than that, no piano in his house. Otherwise there was nothing wrong with it. At Eisenach, indeed, there was a terrible scarcity of music. The local *Musikverein* kept going a series of orchestral and choral concerts, sometimes with vocalists too ; and the Grand Ducal Theatre at Gotha sent its operatic company at intervals, with operettas chiefly ; and there was a Bach festival—only a little one—attended by several distinguished musicians ; and, yes, Carl Hill, the famous Wagnerian bass, came there once. But taking it all round, the nine months spent at Eisenach represented, in Percy's own words, ' musical starvation.' He spent all his spare time—of which German *gymnasia* are not lavish—in studying the piano, harmony, and orchestration by the old difficult aid of text-books and full scores ; though now with some help from two kind celebrities, Professor Thureau, the pianist and conductor, and Graf Waldersee, the great amateur, who helped him in dilemmas, read and advised upon his manuscript, and lent him books.

It was impossible not to be happy amid so much human kindness and earth-born beauty ; but it was not life as young Pitt understood it. It was an interlude : a grotto of Venus, charming but unnatural. Perhaps it was this foretaste of the exile designed for him, of a life which under the law would be musicless



[By courtesy of the German State Railways]

THE WARTBURG, EISENACH

without being in the least charming, that inspired his final rebellion. At any rate it was during the summer at Eisenach that his parents realized the hopelessness of their cause, and gave him leave to study music at the Conservatorium at Leipzig.

The 'seventh heaven of delight' to which their decision admitted him was not the rapture of the ambitious young man who sees the way at last clear towards name and fame ; it was the bliss of one who is at last permitted to live as he understands living. Artificial restrictions had been removed ; barbed wire no longer fenced him from his native fields and flowers ; stuffy curtains no longer excluded heaven's air. Ambitious the youth probably was ; rising seventeen we are all ambitious ; but he had neither the dynamic passion of the superman nor the ruthless egoism of the careerist. His heart of hearts only urged him to live musically. He had a happy temper, a good digestion, a natural facility for intercourse with his fellows. The world without music was a desert ; but, with music, the world was an excellent place. Gay as a lark, he set out for Saxony in the September of 1886.

This time it was joy all the way. The first great object of his sight-seeing in Leipzig was naturally the Conservatorium, which was nothing whatever to look at, and worse inside ; and soon, on the appointed day for the entrance examination, the youngster appeared there and played the piano before a group of elderly gentlemen. They were satisfied ; and asked him what was to be his principal study. He answered boldly that he intended to become a composer, and that the only man he really wished to have lessons from was Jadassohn : whereupon all the elderly gentle-

men burst out laughing, and their chairman looked particularly roguish. And no wonder, for, as the first lesson revealed, he was Jadassohn. Young Pitt did study with other professors too, working at theory and composition chiefly, but also at the piano and organ, and finding that, in comparison with the musical feast of Leipzig, the whole of his previous life had been one slow starvation.

At Leipzig could be heard practically everything there was to hear. On Thursday evenings, except in the summer, there were orchestral concerts in the Great Hall of the New Gewandhaus which were world-famous ; the conductor, Reinecke, was not indeed as inspiring as the orchestra was accomplished, but the soloists were the pick of the Continent ; and to the full rehearsals on Wednesday mornings the students were admitted upon presentation of their identity cards. There they heard some of the greatest artists of the time : Sarasate, Joachim, Sophie Menter, Saint-Saëns, Anton Rubinstein, Hans von Bülow, Davidov, d'Albert, Essipov ; and Percy Pitt heard ' one first performance I shall not easily forget, namely, that of Brahms' *Fourth Symphony*, then a new work played for the first time in Leipzig, the composer being present.' On Saturdays there were chamber concerts in the Small Hall of the Gewandhaus—the Gewandhaus, Cloth Hall, once a mart for textiles. There were string quartets elsewhere ; there were the choral Euterpe concerts ; there was the Liszt Society ; the Meiningen orchestra cropped up again ; there were two churches, St. Thomas and St. Nicholas, whose services young Pitt piously attended. Their choirs were celebrated.

And as for opera, municipal of course, it flowed in one rich and constant stream ; everything by everybody, except *Parsifal*, which was still copyright and confined to Bayreuth. The conductors were Arthur Nikisch and Gustav Mahler, founts of joy and inspiration :

the performers were artists such as Carl Grengg, a bass whose reputation was soon to be consecrated at Vienna and Bayreuth ; Otto Schelper, a very distinguished baritone, Fanny Moran-Olden, Pelagie Sthamer-Andreissen, Carl Perron ; not forgetting a young Canadian, one E. C. Hedmond, then starting his career as a lyric tenor and later to become well known in England.

And all this was to be enjoyed in the company of kindred spirits, young and hopeful and wild with enthusiasm. ‘*Kneipen*,’ it was called—to go and hear the opera, and then on to supper at Helbig’s with a dozen fellows who had been there too, to talk and argue and laugh and drink the light German beer. Pitt was thought ‘more restrained’ than most of them ; ‘not so merry and happy-go-lucky.’ He was very happy, all the same : too deeply and permanently happy to make a song and dance about it. He was not looking feverishly forward to a possible satisfaction. He had entered paradise.

The musical education at the Conservatorium was not at the time all that it might have been. The school was living on its reputation. It was quite as happy-go-lucky as its students ; ‘nor did the professors appear to mind very much whether one worked or not as long as fees were paid.’ They might no doubt have argued that they provided the oppor-

tunity of learning, and that if a lad of eighteen or twenty had anything in him there was no need to do more. But this was to take too proud a view of the individual ; we are not so glacial and remote in our personal development as not to be the better for inspiring example, stirring sympathy, and the exchange of ideas. Great schools are not the fruit of such *laissez-faire* theories. The place, nevertheless, was not only built ' like a rabbit-warren,' but crowded like one, with students of all nationalities. The English were fairly well represented, both in numbers and talent ; one was named Frederick Delius. There was a little ' feeling ' about foreigners among the relatives of the local students, especially if the foreigners won prizes ; but against this little peevishness no nation is in a position to cast the first stone. Percy Pitt won several of the high prizes of the school ; and perhaps received his first hint of the fact, so useful for every artist to know, that success is pleasing to oneself alone.

Every Friday evening there was a students' concert. The young vocalists and instrumentalists there sang and played, with a richly mixed effect, whatever they chose : concertos and vocal arias, chamber music, instrumental soli, *Lieder*. There was a string orchestra, with a piano to represent the wind parts. The ordeal was much fiercer than appearance before the general public, and the comments more candid and unsparing ; only it was blank cartridge, and not the live ammunition of the professional critic. Composers had their chance at the bi-weekly orchestral practices. There was also a possibility of having one's works tried out before a ' real ' audience, at

Bonorand's restaurant in the Rosenthal Park outside the city. The music with which Bonorand, if he it still was, used to entertain his patrons generally took the form of an orchestral concert ; and students could get their works included in the programme. They did not have to pay Bonorand anything ; but as they had to supply the orchestral material, and put down a hundred marks for the bandmaster's tip and the musicians' beer, it could only be done when money was plentiful.

Yes, Leipzig was a happy spot in the young life of many a musician, who has a long way to look back to it now. Besides the Conservatorium students with whom he made permanent friends, Percy Pitt came to know many ex-students who were beginning their careers there, like Ethel Smyth, and the Tuscan Busoni, a musical prodigy who had played the piano in public in Vienna at the age of nine, and now at twenty had already a whole list of successes to his credit. At Leipzig, too, young Pitt's letters of introduction brought him kind friends among the notables : Baron von Tauchnitz, who gave British novels to the Continent ; Doctor von Hase, chairman of the board of directors of the famous music publishing house, Breitkopf and Härtel. So altogether it was with pleasant anticipations of return that Percy went to England for the summer holiday of 1887.

CHAPTER III

The Student in Munich

A shock awaited Percy Pitt at home. His father's finances did not permit of his returning to his studies in Leipzig.

Perhaps if they had been studies in the law, the elder Pitt would have felt better able to make sacrifices for them. But who is going to pinch himself now in order to enable his son to be a beggar in the future? Percy stayed at home: giving lessons, taking small accompanying engagements, and studying alone. He considered the idea of taking a job as a church organist, temporarily and as a means of support; but his instinct revolted from submitting his neck so early to the collar. 'I had seen so many of my friends get into a groove of that kind, and was frightened that it might be my ultimate fate'; and church work, as Walter Bache said, 'is so damned demoralizing.' One must live, no doubt; but might it not be along the lines of one's own choice? Still, Joseph Rheinberger wrote for the organ; and Rheinberger of Munich exercised on him just then an attraction and an influence. When the year of his mourning was ended, and his father consented to send him abroad again, it was to Munich that Percy chose to go, to the Royal School of Music over which Rheinberger presided.

No one ever went to Munich who did not fall in

love with her : ‘ Athens on the Isar,’ her countrymen proudly called her : like Athens, not only a home of the muses and the graces, but set, with all her own charms, in a lovely land. Percy came thither in the later summer of 1888, with a fortnight in hand before the Music School reopened, to spend in the picture-galleries, the Opera House, and the blue hills ; and of all the kind cities of the Continent, to which his fate had led and was to lead him, Munich became ‘ easily ’ the dearest. After the school term started, he had not much time for sight-seeing. The School was a historic foundation, which had been reorganized by Wagner and Hans von Bülow at the request of King Ludwig ; and it was very much alive. Twice a week to each subject, the regular curriculum included harmony and counterpoint, canon and fugue, composition and orchestration , twice a week an organ lesson ; twice a week a choral class ; once a week a lecture on musical history. In addition Percy attended score reading and accompaniment and conducting classes. And there was Rheinberger, as large as life, giving theory lessons with a blackboard, on which the pupils in turn worked out the exercises : a few bars by each pupil, while the rest of the class copied it out rough for subsequent review. For some, however, these were theory exercises in more senses than one. The theory was that all the students took turns ; but Rheinberger had a quick way with newcomers, and soon had his class sorted into workers, copyists, and blackboard cleaners.

If Leipzig had been a good square meal to the music-starved youth, Munich was quite flowing with milk and honey. The Royal family had always been

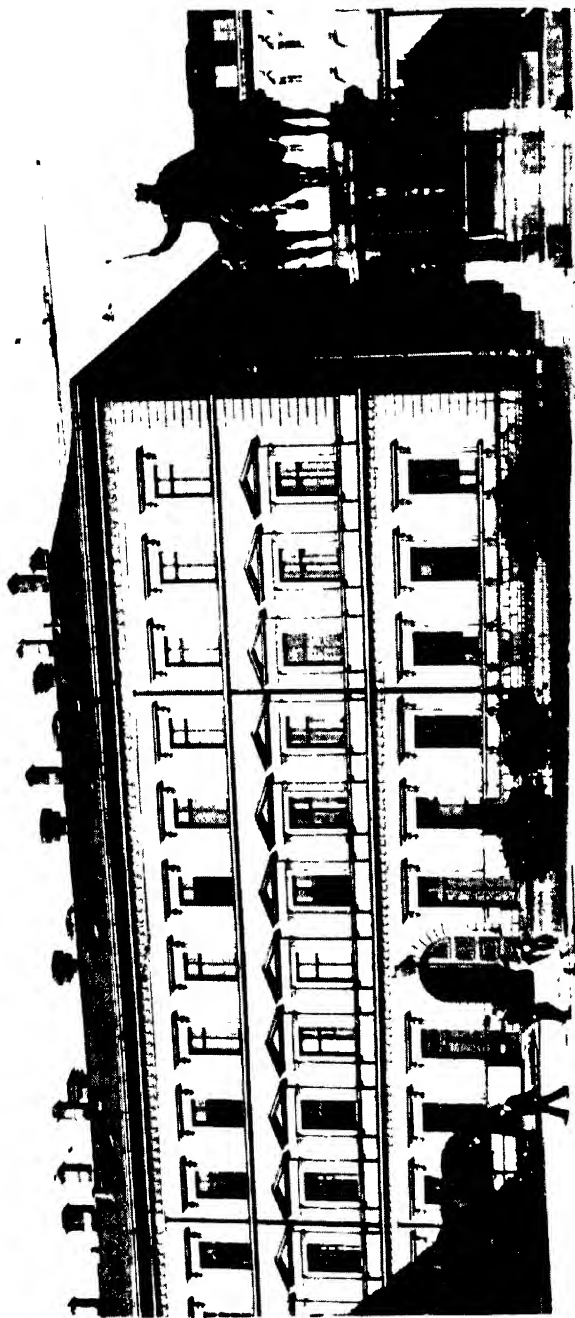
confirmed music-lovers. The mad king, Ludwig II—and though he was only confined at the very close of his life, his diary showed that he had always been in much the same mental condition—had found in music one of his manias, certainly, but one which was at least harmless, perhaps definitely soothing and stabilizing to his harassed mind. His uncle the Regent, who governed during the long reign of Ludwig's mad brother Otto, was almost equally enthusiastic. Percy Pitt heard a story which they used to tell about him in Munich. 'He was always to be found in the Opera House. If a rehearsal was in progress he could be seen on the stage. If nothing of interest was taking place, he would sit in the box office and talk to the officials. As a young man he had married a daughter of the late Queen Isabella of Spain, whose life had been pretty highly seasoned with adventures of one kind and another. When she died in Paris, the obituary notices were naturally full of stories about her various peccadilloes : to such an extent indeed that the Duke, arriving at the theatre on the very evening and being sympathetically received and condoled with, answered, " Yes, very sad. But did you see what a bad press she got ? " ' "

The Royal tendency, combined with Munich's own traditions, insured there being music in the air. True, there were not many concerts : only ten symphony concerts, every winter, at the Odéon, and a series of chamber music evenings under Walter, the leader of the Royal Opera orchestra ; and, of course, any that might be given by visiting artists. These were nearly always eminent, Munich lying on the road of those who were on their way from the north

to Vienna. But to make up for this paucity, there was a full flood of opera. An average of nine operas to the fortnight was almost enough to satisfy anyone. The répertoire included 'practically everything,' classical and modern, native and foreign : under Levi, Fischer, and Strauss, assisted by artists like Thérèse Vogl, Milka Ternina, Lili Dressler, Heinrich Vogl, and Eugen Gura. The drama was on the same level ; and many of its classic pieces derived an added charm from the incidental music of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Lassen, Beethoven and Bizet. These masterpieces, instead of being beyond the reach of a learner's purse, were performed for him free, a certain number of tickets for all the operas and plays being set apart for students of the University and Music School ; and although they only admitted to standing room at the sides and back of the stalls, that could not deter an enthusiast in his first twenties. Dr. Sandberger, the chief of the Music Section of the State Library, used to lend young Pitt operatic full-scores, from which he was able to follow the opera performances in detail. It was not very easy to manage from a basis of 'standing-room only,' especially on *Götterdämmerung* or *Meistersinger* days and nights ; but Percy could get under the dim lamp at the emergency exit of the gallery, and then, as usual perfectly happy, with tired eyes and aching legs, teach himself much that he had always longed to know about orchestral effects.

Dr. Sandberger was not his only eminent friend. As usual, he was well furnished with letters of introduction ; and his temperament enabled him to make happy use of them. People had always been kind to

the chubby, cheerful boy ; they were equally ready to welcome the sociable young man. His short stocky figure, and frank face, still rather chubby and curly, were willingly received again where they had once appeared. It was rather an unusual combination, the pure unworldly enthusiasm so peaceably at home in the world : calling to mind, for all the sturdy English exterior, those Greek youths brought up to life and the lyre. He was privileged to be a frequent guest in the villa in the Luisenstrasse, full of priceless treasures of art, tapestry, furniture, where Franz von Lenbach and his wife kept open house for all interesting people. ‘Everybody whose work and reputation counted for anything was represented at the Sunday afternoon gatherings in the beautiful studio ; nor did any personage of importance think of passing through the Bavarian capital without calling at the hospitable villa.’ Sometimes there were dances there, or musical evenings, or plays, especially during carnival. Hermann Levi, of the Royal Opera, and Percy Pitt, his ardent disciple, were both helpful at such seasons ; on one gay evening, when Levi conducted a little-known Offenbach operetta, his young friend played one of the two pianos which performed the part of an orchestra. These were precious experiences ; ‘indeed, the joy of coming into contact with the hundred and one prominent people connected with art, particularly music and the drama, who frequented the house, was in itself a liberal education.’ The villa von Hornstein was such another house, ‘where musicians, literary men, and painters were in the habit of foregathering ; and it always gave one pleasure to call on the Cornelius family—Frau Peter



THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC ODEON, MUNICH

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Cornelius, the composer's widow, and her son and daughter—certain of finding a warm welcome ' ; and on Frau Raff, the composer's widow : people who were all practising music, or talking about it, or telling stories of the great days when Wagner and Hans von Bülow were consuls in Munich. And sensational enough days they were, when the composer was in process of falling in love with his dear friend's wife.

The *Allotria* was rather a different *milieu* ; it was a club ; but a club for artists of all sorts, where people improvised on the piano—Franz Fischer of the Royal Opera used to display his extraordinary gift of playing extempore his own transcriptions of Wagner's works—and talked and talked as only shop is talked. Here Percy Pitt came to know any number of musicians ; many celebrated ones whom his English friends had not heard of, such as Max von Schillings, Emil Sauer, Eugen d'Albert, Eduard Lassen, Ernst van Dyck, and Heinrich Porges, and some, like Richard Strauss and Felix Mottl, whom they had ; and, in different *milieux* and varying degrees, artists and authors too, the most astonishing of whom was Henrik Ibsen, then at the height of his fame.

This extraordinary man was of clock-like precision in his habits, and might be met any day in the week, wet or fine, at midday, walking down the Maximilianstrasse on the way to his favourite café, where he drank his apéritif while scanning the German and foreign newspapers. I can see him now [Percy Pitt declared] in the long coat down to his heels and the old-fashioned, broad-brimmed tall hat. Having seated himself and given his order he would produce a large comb from his pocket, remove his hat and,

gazing fixedly into it, proceed to arrange his leonine mane of white hair as if to make it match the portraits to be seen in the booksellers' shop windows.

Why did he look into his hat ? His waitress knew : he had a little mirror fixed in the crown. Through her, no doubt, a modification of the idea spread through the female world, and until lately, unconscious disciples of a man of genius, all women looked into their handbags when powdering their noses. Now they have improved upon his method.

This device was not of much use to Percy Pitt ; but the rubbing of shoulders with all these interesting people was very useful to him indeed.

The young man came back from his first summer holiday, in the Black Forest, with mounting confidence, to widening interests. During this first year of truly satisfying learning and rapidly broadening experience, the boy had grown to manhood, the young student had become a young musician. He had worked very hard, he had looked and listened almost harder ; he had blindly loved, he began to know the joy of understanding. Where the seed had been sown, the blade began to shoot : healthily encouraged by economic pressure. He had to be thinking about supporting himself. He was already finding his feet as an operatic coach, doing regular work privately with some of the singers of the Royal Opera ; and, while still studying hard at the School, was giving lessons to private pupils on the piano and on theory, and accompanying operatic and chamber music classes at the School for the sake of practice. The direction so early taken was typical. At twenty to be coaching opera singers might seem like rushing

in where angels would have feared to tread ; but the dangerous task had no terrors for him, nor his beginners ennui. His temper was too detached to suffer from the eccentricities of his fellow-men ; in consequence he was already beginning to be useful to them.

Dr. Sandberger could help him to various forms of work. He made the piano arrangement of a new opera, and helped with the editing and transcribing for Breitkopf and Härtel, who were publishing a complete edition of the works of Orlando di Lasso. The number of English people who had ever heard of Orlando di Lasso must have been very small ; so that it was already in the young man's power, had he wished it, to stagger his friends with his erudition. It was characteristic that even so early he was apt to be called upon when strangers were to be made to feel at home. When Emile Chabrier came to Munich for the rehearsal of his opera *Gwendoline*, it was to Percy Pitt, who spoke French and was so good at getting on with people, that Levi committed him to be looked after. It was a pleasant task, since the young man not only admired his music, which he thought, ' full of significant themes, rugged strength and vital rhythms,' but found him the best of company.

He was an extremely cultured man, bubbling over with wit and humour, an excellent musician, and, as may be remembered, well in the vanguard of that select band of artists who fought Wagner's battles in France in the later days of the 19th century ; and I have always thought what an eternal pity it was that Chabrier did not keep a diary of all the happenings connected with the initial productions of *Lohengrin* and *Tristan* in Paris.

For by this time Percy Pitt also was a sworn Wagnerian. It was impossible to live in Germany and not subscribe to the cult of Wagner. For the summer holiday of his second year in Munich, Percy paid his first visit to Bayreuth. It was a thrilling moment when, a hard-up pilgrim doing it on the cheap, he entered the 'hot and dusty little Franconian town.' Thrilling indeed were the *Ring* conducted by Richter, and *Tannhäuser* conducted by Strauss. But the great impression was made by that very *Parsifal* which had been so disconcerting in the Albert Hall. It was not only the theatre that made the difference ; nor even the performance, conducted by Levi. By this time Percy required no converting. He knew the music well ; and was not so enthralled by the spectacle, as to be deterred from following the orchestration in his full-score, borrowed by special permission from the State Library at Munich.

A little later he went with his friend the Librarian to Weimar—'where they were celebrating the centenary of their little Grand Ducal Opera'—on purpose to hear *Gunlod*, the posthumous work of that Peter Cornelius whose widow had been so kind. They found it dull, Wagner-and-water, or rather Wagner-and-Weber, and nothing to compare with his earlier *Barber of Baghdad*. Young Pitt went also to Paris, and there heard the latest productions of Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Lalo, and particularly Bruneau, whose opera *Le Rêve*, which had been recently staged at the Opéra Comique, made a deep impression. He might have gone to Bayreuth again in an official capacity. Heinrich Porges, one of the early Wagnerian stalwarts, who had so long been in charge of the Flower Maiden

ensemble in *Parsifal* that he was known as *der Blumen-vater*, had already befriended Percy in Munich, and now put forward his name in Bayreuth for an engagement as one of the *musikalische Assistenz*, coaching and stage-conducting at rehearsals, in the Festival. But to his 'eternal regret' he could not accept the offer.

While thus listening, and teaching, and accompanying, and conducting, Percy was by no means neglecting his own composing. On the contrary, 'association with the modern development of composition' acted as a powerful stimulant. He was busy writing songs, part songs, and works for orchestra and piano. At the School concert, announced as the 'Third Trial Concert, chamber music evening,' of 1890, his *Trio for piano, violin, and violoncello* was performed by three of his comrades. The press notices varied from 'too much a school-boy's work to be of any value' to 'decidedly talented' and 'in parts surprising in its technical skill and vivacity of temperament.' It was thought to err on the side of over-orchestration, with its result in a certain confusion and lack of thematic unity. At the Third Trial Concert next year his *Prelude and Bourrée from Suite in D major* was played and praised.

But now his third year at Munich was closing ; and he was not yet in a position to live and study where he pleased. He begged very hard for an extension ; and his father conceded six more months. Still eager for the widest knowledge, he had the resolution to turn his back on his beloved Munich, and try the new pastures of Berlin.

CHAPTER IV

Happy Days in Berlin—Hard Times in London

Percy Pitt arrived in Berlin, as usual, between seasons, and the Royal Opera was still closed. The privation would probably have been fatal, but that Kroll's opera was in full blast with its International Season. Its home was in a kind of park near the Tiergarten, and in fine weather the performances took place on an open-air stage surrounded by little tables for eating and drinking. The stock company was recruited from the best municipal theatres, and sang in German; while some of the stars were foreign, and sang in their own language. It was all quite serious, however; and Pitt was not the man to mind these very human touches. Its capital performances 'helped to tide me over' until the opera *Unter den Linden* opened in September.

In Berlin, impossible as it might seem, there was even more music to be heard than in Leipzig. The Opera, for instance, was open every night in the week; and there one of the exciting performances which he heard was *Tristan and Isolde* with Rosa Sucher, her husband conducting. There were two regular series of orchestral concerts, one conducted by Weingartner, *Hofcapellmeister*, the other by Hans von Bülow, so much remembered in Leipzig, and his assistants; besides 'innumerable independent orchestral con-

certs,' and 'a flood of vocal and instrumental recitals,' at which the most famous artists were to be heard. Berlin was 'a veritable Mecca' for musicians, and conferred an almost indispensable cachet. To have made a success at Berlin was of the highest importance to a Continental career. This was partly because it was the Imperial capital, an irrelevant circumstance which was nevertheless of profound influence, partly because its own standard was really one of the highest efficiency, and partly because the Berlin public was notoriously 'one of the most difficult in Europe,' musically and politically and generally, and was backed by a press which gave no quarter. But there is a great deal of courage in the world, and every week-end issue of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the equivalent of London's *Daily Telegraph*, contained page after page of concert and operatic announcements.

The many letters of introduction, with which Dr. Sandberger and his other Munich friends had furnished him, were young Pitt's key to this treasure house. 'Not only were they the means of helping me to become acquainted with artists and people generally who were making musical history in Berlin, but they also placed innumerable concert and operatic tickets in my way, tickets I should certainly not have been able to purchase out of my very modest allowance.' He knew Weingartner and von Bülow; Emile Sauret and Moszkowsky; Hermann Wolff, the impresario and founder of the Philharmonic Concerts; and got into touch with Drenker's, the leading theatrical and operatic agency.

With all this, however, Berlin was not Leipzig or

Munich. Music there did not seem to have its peculiar effect ; the performances were superb, and yet—— If the souls of the Berliners were not so entirely without music as to fit them for treasons, stratagems and spoils, they did seem to absorb it without being affected by it. The period was a worldly one, no doubt ; the Empire and its capital were busy with the business of being a Great Power for the first time. In that respect the other States were a little out of it ; they knew, though they would not own, that they really would have been nothing politically without Prussia ; and those grapes being slightly sour left them more inclination for other fruit.

No, Berlin had not the musical atmosphere : but it had music, and Percy Pitt would have been very glad to stay there. It was no wonder that he had become attached to a land where, at least, music was believed to be necessary to life : music in floods, music without ceasing : where, in consequence, the company of fellow-artists was abundant and easy of access : where the houses of great men overflowed with harmony. It wanted such a little to enable him to stay among them. He was well up now in a considerable operatic répertoire, and had a working experience of stage performances, besides being quite at ease in the language. Through Drenker's, and his many musical friends, he was almost certain of obtaining an assistant conductorship at one of the smaller municipal theatres. It was not magnificent, and the salary would be something like £5 a month ; but it was the first rung of the ladder, a living wage, experience, and opportunity. But it could not be

immediate ; some months might pass, even a year or two ; and money was not available for keeping alive meanwhile. In 1893 he returned to England.

It was oddly like entering a foreign land. No doubt one loves one's country : but as one loves one's family : not necessarily as the most convenient selection possible. All the friends he had made during his apprenticeship were Continental. All the circles in which his young name was known and his talents respected were German. The very agents who were hopeful of finding him jobs were German too. The elder Pitt had really made sacrifices, both in convictions and cash, to his son's career ; but in refusing to let him work in the favourable conditions those sacrifices and the lad himself had created, he was spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar. Perhaps the young man, however unwilling to return, did not himself realize, with sufficient force to be able to express it convincingly, how much in the way of 'influence' he was about to lose—that help at the outset which offered sincerely and used honestly was as legitimate an advantage as his father's connection among lawyers might have been. Perhaps George and Edwina Pitt disliked the notion of a Continental career, and insular prejudice combined with parental affection to urge that they were in danger of losing their son. When he returned to 'my native land, where nobody knew me,' he must himself have struck them as tinged with the unknown. The Munich press notices had sometimes referred to him as 'this young American' ; but the *Echo Musical* of Brussels, which was always very kind to him, described him in a laudatory notice as '*anglais de naissance, italien*

de physionomie, allemand par l'éducation.' Quite the foreigner : although he did not appear as startlingly as Alexander Mackenzie had done, who returned to the bosom of his family in long hair and a shawl.

The contrast, which from his Continental Eden he had been inclined to draw to his country's disadvantage, proved only too just.

The embarrassment of choice had been the chief difficulty among the musical riches of Berlin ; in London the supply was meagre, the price as a rule high, and—something else was wrong. Opera was hardly discernible, to an ear used to the rapid succession of masterpieces in Berlin and Leipzig. The Covent Garden season lasted about fourteen weeks, from April to July, and included a great deal of ' Donizetti, Bellini, Flotow, Gounod, and early Verdi ' ; occasionally an autumn season was given by the Covent Garden company or the Carl Rosa. Concerts were more numerous, but few enough compared with the Continental ' flood,' St. James's being the only London concert hall. There were the Philharmonic Concerts at about the same spring period as the opera, and the Richter Concerts, considered by many rather highbrow, at much the same period—as though, like game, music were only in season at a particular time of year ; there were the London Symphony Concerts, conducted by Sir George—then Mr.—Henschel, which tried gallantly to give good music at popular prices ; and in winter music furtively raised its head in a series of concerts at the Crystal Palace, which meant ' an unpleasant railway journey, and, at the end of it, a concert given by a moderately rehearsed orchestra in an execrable

glass concert hall.' There were also, of course, individual recitals. But that moderately rehearsed orchestra at the Crystal Palace was no exception. The English players were admirable, and, like Englishmen in general, far more resourceful and capable of responding to a sudden call on their powers than those abroad ; but this very readiness tempted conductors to dispense with the rehearsals, so painstakingly practised on the Continent, and necessary if a performance was to be a finished work of art. ' Although the capacity of our orchestras,' Percy Pitt wrote, ' as exemplified by quality and volume of tone, was undoubtedly superior to those I had been accustomed to hear on the Continent, the actual ensemble was loose ; that precision which can only result from constant and regular music-making was lacking ' ; and the great enemy to perfection was the prevailing deputy-system, under which members of the orchestra were allowed to send deputies either to rehearsals or performances, so that even after several rehearsals the conductor was not sure of getting a good performance, as several of the orchestra might be new and not know the work at all. The same criticism has often been directed against the English stage, where the brilliance of the individual actors does not compensate, in Continental eyes, for the want of artistic unity.

The mediocrity of the ensemble was one of the more tangible points, like the scarcity and expensiveness of musical performances, in that *something* which made London just then so dreary a place to the music lover. If some glamour was wanting in Berlin, with all its hard bright energy of performance, what could be said of London, with its cold damp languor of

inactivity? There was in Germany ‘that indescribable *something* which seemed to give a different sound and significance to everything one listened to.’ Music seemed to have gone right out of Englishmen’s everyday life : out of the life of a race famous for its poetry, in earlier days ‘merrie’ with songs and strings, with pipe and tabor. It seemed inexplicable ; for Protestantism, or rather Puritanism, which was the historic root of the trouble, was not confined to England. In England, however, an accidental circumstance—the licentiousness of the Restoration court—had given the starker forms of Puritanism a particularly strong hold on the middle class ; while the political position at the same period, which led to the virtual elimination of Catholicism from English life, had co-operated in banishing music from the churches. And this it was which had been her undoing. The Church had for centuries been among the strongest of the influences in daily life ; but compared with such variants as the Lutheran Church in Germany, still rubbing elbows with the elaborate Catholic services, the English Protestant Church was musicless, to say nothing of the dissenting chapels. Left without a standard, drawing-room music had declined until it had become a byword ; and what with that and the barrel-organs, music was in a fair way to be considered an actual nuisance. There were, indeed, German bands ; but they were not of a nature to make converts, and were popularly supposed to be bands which had been forcibly ejected from Germany.

The result was that to make a living by music was indeed nearly as desperate as Pitt senior had always

said it would be. Percy had some splendid letters of introduction to the directors of various institutions ; but these had their own pupils to place. Agents, who consented to give his piano-playing an audition, had already too many accompanists on their books. ' Nobody seemed to want me or my work.' His successes, even, were abroad. In October, 1893, when he was already at home, the results were announced of a competition held by the Carillon Society of Brussels, a ' Grand Concours International,' in which, under class ' symphony,' Percy Pitt divided the second prize with a Pole, for a *suite d'orchestre*, and the third prize with a German, for a *composition libre* ; in the section ' *ouverte à tous les genres de musique* ' he won the first prize, a gold medal, for a ' solo ' ; and was named among those who received ' warm and cordial congratulations ' from the judges. A *Lamento* of his was performed at a concert in Vienna. The next year, at the Concours du Mois de Janvier in Paris, he won four first prizes (or three and a half, one being divided) and also the prize given by the Ministry of Fine Arts, which was ' *un objet d'art, terre cuite, d'une valeur de 70 francs* '—in fact, a bust of La France. These were barren honours. His parents were becoming ' somewhat impatient, and expected quick results ' from his expensive foreign education—results in hard cash, that reassuring symbol of success.

The young man did his best to show some return. He gave lessons ; got ' a little private chamber music playing, At-Home work, and accompanying at a small fee ' ; he turned out little pot-boilers—' piano pieces, part songs, hymn tunes '—which were well enough noticed ; and ' even made pianoforte arrange-

ments, operatic fantasias, and light songs under various *noms de plume*.' Under *noms de plume* : he was ashamed of this hack-work, and afraid of getting caught up into it. Once there was a 'humorous' incident, when he went with three eminent foreign friends

to provide some chamber music at the suburban house of a hostess of the *nouveau riche* type. Upon our arrival at the station—Richmond, I think—we were met by a sort of family omnibus and driven to the house at which the At-Home was. After knocking and ringing several times, the door was eventually opened by a portly butler, who, although viewing us with evident suspicion, perhaps on account of Rubio's somewhat unkempt appearance, permitted us to enter, but decided that he would do well to keep us on the doormat until he had satisfied himself that we were not brigands or something worse. He then left us for a moment, and the following conversation, which was taking place a room or so away, reached our ears :

'What is it, James?'

'Please, my lady, the band's come!'

It was funny ; but before one has made one's name such things are not all fun. It was all very well for a Fernandez-Arbos and a Rubio—and it was their fault, too, for looking like foreign musicians—but they were in no danger of ever being really 'the band.'

Musical comedy would be better than that. At the Savage Club Percy Pitt met plenty of its practitioners : dramatists, librettists, and song-writers. One of the club-members was preparing the book of a musical play for a well-known comedian of the moment, and asked Pitt whether he would like to

try his hand at setting some of the numbers ; if the great man approved, they might lead to more. Full of hope and joy, he did so, and a day was fixed for him to come and play his tunes to those concerned. He lost the opportunity for the last reason he or his friends would ever have expected. He was the soul of punctuality ; and on this occasion he somehow managed to be three-quarters of an hour late. The star was furious, another composer was chosen, and young Percy was heart-broken at having been saved from taking a wrong turning. For such tragedies one *must* procure oneself some consolation. He was normally too hard up even to hear music ; he could not buy gallery seats for what opera there was, and went only if friends invited, or publishers or pressmen gave paper ; but when a batch of piano-pieces just then sold unexpectedly, he fled abroad to spend his summer holidays in a less inhospitable land.

It was a lucky journey : not for fortune so much as friendship. No wonder the Continent seemed an ever-flowing fount of pleasure. At Brussels he met the brothers Eugène and Théophile Ysaye.

Eugène was building a house in Brussels ; but as it was not finished, the brothers were staying out at Uccle. With an old Munich school-fellow, who was studying with them, Percy went out night after night to revel in modern Belgian music ; they tore themselves away with difficulty to run like hares for the last train back. ‘ Although the pianist, the younger of the two, did not possess the same strong personality as his brother Eugène, he was perhaps,’ Percy Pitt thought, ‘ the more complete musician.’ With both he formed an enduring friendship.

Too soon his empty purse forced him to leave them, and return to that terrifying drudgery in London. He wrote thence to his old master, Joseph Rheinberger, asking permission to dedicate to him one of those pieces which he still doggedly produced, and telling him something of his disappointment and discouragement. Rheinberger wrote back in a very shaky old hand. He was pleased to hear of a former pupil, he said, and glad that he was composing,

for you have the gift for it ; but don't go about it too ' furiously,' but calmly and clear-headedly. You know what I mean ! I gladly accept the dedication. You must not be disheartened by the difficulties with publishers—every composer has to go through them, and we composers too often forget that the publisher is primarily a *tradesman* and not an artist !

And as the artists, who do appreciate one's works, are so often not tradesmen, it is all very difficult. All the same, though it did not seem so at the moment, the young man possessed, in his wide acquaintance among musicians, a great advantage over many young strugglers. He had plenty of friends in England, musicians and artists of all sorts : and some of them eminent, and some of them prosperous : though, to be English friends, a surprising number of them were foreigners. Among them were ' Andrew Black, Edward Lloyd, Santley, Sims Reeves, Moritz Rosenthal, Tito Ricordi, Joachim, Piatti, Sir Arthur Sullivan, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Adelina Patti, Whistler, Maeterlinck, Buonamici, Puccini, Sarasate, Alma Tadema, John Pettie, Hamish MacGunn.' To complete the cosmopolitanism of his world, he had made friends with the painter Arbos Rubio



HENRY WOOD AND PERCY PITT

Falero and other Spanish artists settled in London ; and it was through them and through Francis Coutts, later Baron Latymer, that he came to know and love Isaac Albeniz, the Spanish musician and composer.

I really think [he wrote] that Albeniz was one of the most sympathetic and loveable men one could possibly meet. I remember, too, that at this particular time he had just finished his second opera, *Pepita Jimenez*, and one summer evening several of us spent some hours at Francis Coutts' flat in Walsingham House, a building which stood on the site of the present Ritz Hotel, whilst Albeniz played us this, his latest opera—a very beautiful and characteristic work.

By these friends young Pitt's work was appreciated ; and it was through one of them that he secured a temporary engagement, which was to open out unexpectedly into a practicable road through the world.

Alfred Schulz-Curtius, whom he had met at Bayreuth as British representative of the Wagner Festival performances, had lately started a series of orchestral Festival Concerts in England, under the direction of such eminent foreign conductors as Levi, Strauss, and Mottl ; and in 1895 he was arranging to include three important excerpts from Wagner's music-dramas in the programme. The Second Act of the *Flying Dutchman* was to be sung in English ; for this the chorus-master was to be his new general musical adviser, a young English musician called Henry Wood. Excerpts from *Parsifal* and the *Meistersinger* were to be given in German, and for those the work of chorus-master was divided between Anton Schlosser of Bayreuth and Percy Pitt.

In addition it was, of course, Percy Pitt who took charge of the newcomer Mottl, and showed him round London, and took him to the theatre. They went and saw a melodrama at Drury Lane among other things ; and when the visitor was asked for his impressions, he replied, ' My friend, the greatest sensation I had was on entering the vestibule, to find a statue of Shakespeare on one side and Balfe on the other ! ' Rather beautiful, really ; but foreigners are so terribly reasonable. It was Mottl—Percy Pitt used to tell the story—who applied an equal reasonableness to an experience related by a brother conductor. This eminent gentleman, who thought very highly of his own classical conducting, was describing a strange incident in connection with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. ' I was conducting the C minor,' he said, ' and no sooner had I started the first movement than I felt uneasy, a kind of uncanny feeling as if someone were standing by, looking over my shoulder ; and as I got further into the movement it suddenly flashed across my mind that the shade of the Master was watching over me—and as I finished the magnificent Allegro I heard a voice say, *Endlich !* ' (At last !) Mottl was listening all awe and attention. ' Yes, yes ! but are you certain it was the Allegro ? Surely it must have been the Finale ! '

Mottl was a man about whom good stories collected, nor did death put an end to them. Later (to anticipate a little) a friend of Percy Pitt's visited a well-known metal-worker in Munich and admired a beautifully chased cinerary urn on a top shelf. ' Oh,' said the proprietor, ' that is Mottl.' It turned out that the urn had been ordered and the ashes put in, and at

the last moment there had been a dispute about it, and the ashes had been retained until the relatives should feel inclined to settle the account.

However, this was happily some way ahead, in the days when Mottl was conducting in London, and Percy Pitt was showing him the sights and rehearsing Wagner for him.

As work, and properly paid work, the chorus-master's job was welcome indeed. As just such work as Percy Pitt liked and was peculiarly fitted to do, it was better still. As the occasion of a new friendship, and the beginning of a connection with the circumscribed real world of music in England, it was heaven-sent ; and if it actually led to deflecting the young man a little from what was to be his peculiar line, the excursion was one of those that his youth would have been the poorer for not making.

CHAPTER V

The Magic Circle

The chance job at the Festival Concert led to association with Henry Wood, and Queen's Hall, and concert music in general.

Henry Wood was a very different temperament. He was so dark, lively, and gesticulatory that he hardly looked like an Englishman, and Queen Victoria had to be assured from his own lips that these attributes all came from a Welsh mother. As a conductor he was sometimes abused as too temperamental ; both his physical movements and his interpretations startled those who were used to something more sedate. If these were defects at all, they were the defects of the great quality of vitality, which he not only possessed himself but infused to an astonishing degree into English musical life. He was the angel who troubled the stagnant waters of the nineties ; and to him, as Percy Pitt and many another later declared, his countrymen owed a debt of gratitude beyond what they could repay. At the moment he was starting on his beneficent career, as conductor for Robert Newman's Promenade Concerts at Queen's Hall.

When Percy Pitt was a small boy, one of the grown-ups who used to visit his father's house was called Robert Newman. Some twenty years afterwards

Newman was one of those who built the Queen's Hall—in 1893, the year when Percy Pitt returned from Germany, who thus came in upon the turn of the tide. The Prince of Wales attended the first concert, in November of that year, and it was opened to the public with a choral and orchestral concert in December ; in August, 1895, Newman's 'Proms' began.

Promenade Concerts were already an institution. They had been started in 1838 at the Lyceum, and continued at Covent Garden. Their intention was to provide music at popular prices ; and some of their earlier programmes, in the days of Balfe and his compeers, were also 'popular' enough. Refreshments were sold, and were a large element in the profits of the enterprise. The first half of the programme was given by three or four soloists, vocal or instrumental, who were allowed to take innumerable encores and to sing atrocious royalty ballads. The second or orchestral half was often a good deal curtailed by the encores in the first ; it began with an operatic or light-operatic fantasia, and ended with some rollicking popular march, but its grand feature, from time immemorial, was a cornet solo. This was generally performed by 'a portly gentleman with much expanse of dress-shirt front,' and very well performed too ; and consisted of some such sound favourite as *The Lost Chord* or Schubert's *Serenade*. Sometimes, too, in those dark ages, a waltz was sung by a chorus of children in fancy costume, no doubt a sort of accidental survival of some ancient success. These programmes, though they could not be said to demoralise, at any rate could have had little influence

in educating the public taste, and were indeed actually behind it. Under Sullivan, they improved ; but when he gave Beethoven's symphonies, it was observed by the *Musical Times* that ' the music was so good that it hindered the sale of refreshments, and the financial results were proportionately unsatisfactory.'

At the time when Queen's Hall was built, orchestral music was coming into favour, including a good deal of operatic, after oratorio had for nearly two centuries had it all its own way. It was another instance of the weakening of the Puritan taboo. And now London could have good music every night of the autumn season. Certain nights in the week were always devoted principally to certain composers : Wagner and Beethoven on Mondays and Fridays respectively : Saturday was ' popular ' and Tuesday ' semi-popular ' : and after some shuffling, Thursday settled down as ' British ' composers, and Wednesday as alternate Brahms and Bach-Handel. Henry Wood's courage and energy succeeded in introducing and establishing, in the teeth of prejudice and indifference, a great number of works by both British and foreign composers, close on three hundred being performed under his direction either for the first time, or for the first time in England, or in London. The enterprise was successful at once, and the number of people willing to stand still—for they soon ceased to promenade—during long orchestral works was more than enough to take away the reproach of barbarism. The success of the ' Proms ' led to a series of Symphony Concerts on Saturdays and orchestral concerts on Sunday afternoons ; though the last were taken over

by a Sunday Concert Society formed for the purpose, to meet the objections of the London County Council regarding the profits of Sunday entertainments.

A comparison of the present-day type of Promenade Concert programme [Percy Pitt wrote twenty years later] with that to which audiences were accustomed during the earlier years of my association with Queen's Hall, is a particularly instructive thing, and helps to drive one point home in the strongest manner. I refer to Henry Wood's influence in the merit and variety of programmes, the gradual elimination of inferior music and its replacement by the classics, together with the more modern development of our art as exemplified in the works of Wagner, Elgar, Strauss, Mahler, Roger, Charpentier, Debussy, Ravel ; not forgetting the Russian school, for it is always easy to overlook the fact that most of the spade-work in the direction of introducing the music of Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Moussorgsky, Dergomiszky, Glazounov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Scriabin, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Liadov, was done either at the Promenades, the Saturday Symphony Concerts, or the Sunday Afternoon Concerts, all of which were for many years so important a factor in London's musical life.

The Schulz-Curtius concerts had brought Percy Pitt to Queen's Hall, and since Robert Newman, reigning there, was an old family friend, and Henry Wood soon a new personal one, and Harry Lane Wilson, another of them, was accompanist at the piano for the Promenade Concerts, it was 'quite a family party,' to which Percy was irresistibly drawn both by affection and by the atmosphere of a place where music was a living joy to performers and hearers alike. His own first serious work to see the light, his *New Suite in Four Movements*, was performed

there in August, 1895. Although 'only about the premises unofficially,' he was characteristically soon a busy helper, holding auditions, accompanying rehearsals, gradually identifying himself with the work of Newman's reorganized Queen's Hall Choral Society. He made a short turn in another direction when Hedmondt, his Leipzig fellow-student, held an opera season at Covent Garden, including several Wagner operas, and Percy coached him for the part of Siegmund and acted as assistant conductor; and hard upon that came a proposal which might have determined his career at once on operatic lines. Henry Wood had just produced Villiers Stanford's *Shamus O'Brien* for Augustus Harris at the old Opéra Comique Theatre, and was asked to select a company for a tour of the work in the United States. He named Percy Pitt as the conductor; but Stanford already had a musician in view. Percy's fate was setting against opera, and in the direction of the concert. In 1896 Lane Wilson gave up accompanying at Queen's Hall in favour of singing and composing, and Percy Pitt took his place.

And now what he called 'the magic circle'—formed by Queen's Hall, the Langham Hotel, Pagani's, and No. 1, Berners Street—was pretty nearly the line which described his existence. He slept in Camden Road; but he lived in the other sphere. His time was fully occupied. As an accompanist his sympathy and skill and resource were heaven-sent, and highly valued; besides the piano, he played the organ accompaniments, and also on occasion the celesta part in an orchestral work. Accompanying is not exactly life's crown; but still doing things which you can do

very well is always a pleasure ; and there were other attractions too. Besides its permanent frequenters, the magic circle drew within its circumference a quick succession of foreign conductors ; and it was Percy Pitt who interpreted at their rehearsals, and indeed looked after them generally. Neither Strauss, Debussy, d'Indy, Weingartner, nor Colonne understood English ; Nikisch did, and of course Richter ; some others partly. The virtue of usefulness was rewarded in kind, for the intimate association with these experts was highly educative.

The 'joy' of being connected with Queen's Hall was not only inspired by association with kindred spirits in a congenial atmosphere, but also by the prospect of daily bread, and the stimulus of opportunity. He had composed songs in the forlorn hope of making a living ; now that he could live, his ambition turned naturally to suites and symphonies. The circumstances were favourable both ideally and practically to the production of concert music ; not only was he always among those who talked and thought of nothing else, but he had now in that sphere what the young musician so sorely needs, a chance to be heard. Henry Wood could be relied on to give his works their first performance. He had already, while out of work, composed a gloomy opus full of decay and complicated orchestration ; but now, putting it aside for the moment, he turned to cheerfuller themes.

In 1896 his *Coronation March*, inspired by Queen Victoria's approaching Diamond Jubilee, was performed at a Promenade Concert. It had a rather solemn and religious character : almost too solemn, some critics thought, and insufficiently festive : but

he was still young enough to be entitled to be solemn. The piece was said to be 'cleverly,' 'effectively,' 'brilliantly,' or 'pretentiously' scored, according to the critic's attitude towards the modern orchestration ; but at any rate it was a complete success.

In December of the same year his 'miniature suite,' *Fêtes Galantes*, was also received with applause by the audience, and with praise by the critics. It was perhaps more in his native vein than the march, and as gay, and vivacious, and piquant as such things should be ; and the 'modern' scoring, being to some extent subordinated to the national-historical demands of the subject, drew less criticism. One critic indeed thought that the young composer had entirely freed himself from the influence of 'the heavy German pedagogic counter-point.' It was not so much a real change of heart, however, as an instance of his entirely characteristic sympathy with his subject. If Percy Pitt chose to write a suite based upon the poetry of Verlaine, he did it as one might imagine Verlaine would have done, had he been able to compose music, rather than like Percy Pitt with a French label.

After a *Concertino in C minor* for clarinet and orchestra had been received with equal kindness, a piece was performed at a Symphony Concert in March, 1898, which showed the same characteristic, a characteristic which lay at the root of his tendency towards dramatic music. To enter imaginatively into the life of others was an urge which was fundamental with him. This composition was an overture, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and, extremely successful, was hailed as the best thing he had yet done, and as the work of a coming

man. In spite of its title it was not properly 'programme music.' The contrast between Katharine's violence and the suaver theme of her ultimate transformation was one of character and mood, rather than of incident; and was expressed with a rich and robust mastery for which the critics had not been prepared. They scented Russian influence, without making any charge of plagiarism. 'Is there not something rather refreshing in the reflection that Mr. Percy Pitt's Katharine has been coquetting with Rimsky-Korsakov? Shakespeare himself would have smiled at the Tartaric wildness of the cat that his compatriot Petruchio woos in this overture with such success.' The instrumentation was again praised or blamed as 'very modern'; and, while admired as showing a striking mastery of orchestral resource, was described as both difficult and 'crowded.' It was evident that the young man's danger would lie in his excess of learning.

Those who awaited his next composition in the expectation of seeing whether the pitfall would be avoided were not much enlightened by the *Hercules* march, which was something of a digression. A letter in *The Times*, at first anonymous, but later understood to have been written by Sir Arthur Sullivan, had vigorously called attention to what it described as the 'boycott' of British composers by British military bands; and the Prince of Wales had accordingly expressed a wish that a British composer should be invited to write a new march expressly for the ceremony of trooping the colour at the Queen's next birthday parade. The War Office thought of asking Sullivan himself, but probably felt he might resent

what would look like an imputation of interested motive ; and the choice fell upon Percy Pitt. His march was played with great success by the Coldstream Guards at the Horse Guards Parade on May 21, 1898, in the presence of the Prince and of the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Wolseley.

This military episode was gratifying, but rather odd to a peaceable young musician, nor was the Boer War an occurrence which affected him and the musical world in general very powerfully ; even the ' war slump ' being so slight that it was a question whether it ever existed. In 1899 an event occurred which touched the musical much more nearly, and was indeed thought to have something ' Napoleonic ' about it, in that respect differing considerably from the war. It was the inauguration by Robert Newman of the London Musical Festival. His ambitions ran to large-scale enterprises ; and after having introduced Lamoureux and his orchestra to the British public, he perhaps felt that some native effort should come next. The Festival consisted in a series of twelve concerts played by the Lamoureux and Queen's Hall orchestras, singly or in combination, supported by the best vocal and instrumental artists available, including Paderewski and Ysaye.

It was indeed a mighty gesture [Percy Pitt wrote] and the increased effect of the 200 players in Queen's Hall was not so much one of volume, but rather of magnified richness and clarity—of quality and not quantity. Of course it cannot be said that all the works of which the programmes were made up actually gained in the process. Some, as a matter of fact, seemed to suffer from distortion. On the

other hand, there were many where the effect was nothing short of overwhelming, as for instance the *Leonora* overture No. 3, the *Meistersinger*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Flying Dutchman* overtures; the *Kaiser Marsch*, the *Huldigungs Marsch*, and works similarly planned on bold outlines.

He himself had a place among the British composers performed, the others being Elgar, Cowen, Parry and Mackenzie. His contribution, given by the English band, was *Hohenlinden*, a ballad for male voices and orchestra; and he was called and cheered. It was a 'stirring and dramatic' setting of Campbell's words; while in contrast with the almost savage vigour of the battle music, all were struck by the beauty of the passage heralding the words, 'It is dawn,' and by the 'beautiful song-like melody' of the final 'Few, few shall part.' The dramatic sense, which still hovered in the background of the composer's mind, again showed itself in the choice and treatment of the subject. The instrumentation was again described as complex and 'modern,' and it was said that he need fear comparison with no composer in respect of his control of orchestral effects.

His *Air de Ballet*, and his *Cinderella* suite, performed in the same year, were in the vein of the *Fêtes Galantes*, and as graceful and charming, while meeting with even more complete recognition. *Cinderella* was again not programme music, but a series of 'tone-pictures' which were regarded as happily suggesting the several turns of the heroine's fortunes. That his work should be brilliantly scored was now become 'a matter of course,' and he was described as occupying a prominent position among young English composers.

There were others as good, said one critic rather grudgingly, who had not the same chance to show their quality. And that was a pity, if true ; but still it was something to be thankful for, that these charming pieces at least were not suppressed by ill-fortune. It is not every young composer, certainly, who could so early expect to be rendered by Ysaye. At a Symphony Concert in February, 1900, the great violinist performed Percy's *Ballade for Violin and Orchestra*. It was received with vociferous applause, and highly praised both for its technical and imaginative qualities ; for its deep and strong feeling and its ' full-blooded ' richness of colour. The *Ballade* was played in the same year by Ysaye in the Royal Opera House at Dresden.

Percy Pitt had often been mentioned among coming men ; now, it was said, he had arrived.

After this success it was inevitable that he should be represented at the second Musical Festival in April, 1900 ; but he had nothing new ready. Nothing quite new. But there was that gloomy and ambitious work, that song of youth unemployed, which he had written six years before ; and it was this which was performed at the Festival Concert, for the first time.

It was a Symphonic Prelude, *Le Sang des Crépuscules*, based upon a poem with that title which was the third volume of a trilogy, ' *L'Agonie du Soleil*,' by the young poet Charles Guérin. The poem was of the most depressing nature, and freely described by the critics as morbid and decadent ; according to the programme, the setting of the sun was taken as a symbol of the dying-out of life in a human being. Percy Pitt never wrote programme music, and his

Prelude was as usual subjectively sympathetic, entering into the mood of the poem, rather than trying to reproduce exactly what it said in another language. The objections of the critics to this relatively immature work were as encouraging, in the circumstances, as their commendations. With a great deal of praise for its loftiness and power, for its 'marvellous' harmonies and masterly orchestration, there was also a vigorous attack by the opponents of the 'modern' orchestration upon a piece which exhibited the defects as well as the merits of the school. And as these were defects which his later music had already begun to shed, such observations were both instructive and cheering.

The difference in outlook between the old school and the young was vivaciously put, apropos of this very work, by a contemporary writer in the press—*Sforzando* of the *Morning Leader*.

These young men are learning the new language of music. Composers have only just begun to understand the orchestra—the most subtle instrument of all. No doubt in their desire to use all its capabilities they overstep the mark. In the old days a man wrote a composition more or less playable on the piano, and then he coolly set about arranging it for the orchestra. Even Wagner composed in that way—great reformer and innovator as he was. Nowadays a composer does not arrange his piano compositions for the orchestra, but treats it as an instrument in itself. . . . The fault of the modern school is that in their desire to push the art to its utmost limits they have created what may be called a harmony school of music. They seek to obtain their effects solely through harmony, colouring, and ingenious scoring, with the result that instead of their

music being unintellectual, [as many people thought] it appeals perhaps too much to the brain, and in listening to it you find you are not touched or moved, but that your brain is pleased with the composer's ingenuity at every turn—or perhaps pleased that it can perceive that ingenuity.

It was a language, this critic thought, which clever young men were practising, in order that genius in its own good time might speak in it ; meanwhile

the modern composer endeavours to give you a poem in music descriptive of his own moods or the moods of some other subject. If that poem does not demand melody the modern composer does not attempt to be obviously melodic ; he does not see why he should not obtain the effect he wants by means of a rich and elaborate harmony and a skilful use of the peculiar character of each orchestral instrument. He does not require the clear melodic design [which some people still demanded] ; it would not say what he wanted it to say.

These last few words indicated the truth that the revolution in music was, like the kindred development of the other arts, not a purely technical matter, but had its roots deep down in the spirit of the age : in what men thought about life and therefore what they 'wanted to say.' The gradual fading of the 'clear melodic design' was a thing that was happening fundamentally. The relatively simple and clearly defined explanations of the universe which had long satisfied mankind were disappearing before the onslaught of a great number of sometimes mutually unrelated ideas and forces ; life had quite left off being 'one grand, sweet song,' or even a confident

march, or a genteel drawing-room tinkle. Intellectual honesty demanded that the fact should be recognized ; but the immediate result was that what the young men ' wanted to say ' was inclined to be, in the literal sense, incoherent. They could express moods, as the critic said, often of great intensity and with great success ; or describe isolated phenomena with originality ; but there was not, and there is not to-day, anything central to be said. So much was this the case that some, whether poets, painters, or musicians, warmly denied that anything might allowably be said in any circumstances ; and affirmed that the proper aim of speech was simply speaking, without any *arrière-pensée*. More detached observers, however, like *Sforzando*, looked forward to a time when a ' genius ' should arrive, and out of the age's confusion of perceptions, so rich and yet so sterile, so genuine and yet so cynical, draw the power to speak a new creative word. Meanwhile, in the view of those who compared them with those past, the younger school of musicians were weak thematically, but their harmony, generally crowded, was at its best rich and complex, and at its worst confused and difficult.

Percy Pitt was touched by the spirit of the age rather negatively than positively, and would never have dreamed of troubling his head about its metaphysics ; but he was ' a born orchestrator,' and his adolescence had come under the influence of the school which opened virgin fields of orchestration. His technical skill and native talent for instrumental combinations, rather than his philosophy of life, inclined him towards the school's characteristic fault of over-

doing the orchestra ; although he no doubt felt unconsciously or half-consciously the want of a clear call which might express itself with thematic power. In his first efforts he had shown that he was exposed to the youthful danger of being too clever ; but he was saved from developing into pedantry by the strong social element in his character. He liked people. He liked kindness, and was kind ; he liked *agrément* and was adaptable. The Concert-hall afforded plenty of scope for the cold ingenuity of the virtuoso ; but his human sympathy was constantly giving his work a dramatic twist. The stage was again strongly suggested by the ballet suite, *Dance Rhythms*, of 1901. The piece was heartily liked and highly praised precisely for its thematic strength, and because he had now brought his ingenious and complex harmonies into such control that he could use them ‘with an appearance of artless simplicity.’

His work was, of course, occasionally criticized as reminiscent of various well-known composers : when serious or impassioned, it recalled Wagner and Tchaikovsky : when strangely harmonized, Strauss : when light, Delibes or Bizet. But this is an invariable phenomenon ; it is almost impossible for a composer to write music which shall remind no critic of anything he ever heard. If some original genius succeeds in doing so, his work is not unnaturally attacked as not being music at all. Undoubtedly young Pitt’s works did owe something to earlier masters, and much to the originators of the ‘modern’ movement ; he was, however, not accused of imitation, but was allowed to be a genuine artist working along the same lines.

THE MAGIC CIRCLE

The impression left by the total of his works, so far, was that of a composer already deeply studied and brilliantly skilled in the technique of his art, interested in its forward movement, and on the emotional side completely sincere, and original in that sense : in the sense of being always himself and never false or imitative : and as to the degree of power which that self commanded—the ultimate question for every man's greatness or mediocrity—it was as yet too early to be certain. Some men have come to their full spiritual stature at thirty, but by no means all. It could only be said that his work showed more passion and energy, more depth and more height, than people generally would have expected from a personality so apparently simple and serene.

The kindly, social side, which was the one he ordinarily turned towards the world, was doubly misleading ; for, on the one hand, if you behave like an ordinary human being no one will believe you are an artist, and on the other, the more consideration you show for other people's feelings the less they will credit you with feelings of your own. Yet it was not only the accident of unemployment that had produced the *Crépuscules* ; nor was it only the accident of a Festival Concert which led him to turn to it again. Its melancholy harmonies—or discords, if the older school preferred—nay, even its brooding concern with death, that supreme disappointment, expressed something which existed deep beneath his cheerful exterior. Perhaps if he had been asked what he regretted, he would have said it was that time of springing hopes and cloudless happiness, his student-time in Germany, 'when Youth and I lived in it together.' Since then

he had been unhappy, unwanted, unbelieved in : poor, without independence : alone, though not bereaved : besides being a shade older : and though Queen's Hall had brought a betterment, his future seemed to lie chiefly in accompanying. But this sequence of events was only the form accidentally taken by that process of disillusion, which life applies to none more swiftly and surely than to that perfection maniac, the artist. This poor earth has never promised, and has not the least idea how to perform, what the human imagination declares was in the contract.

'Ah me ! I think this is a poor sort of game,' he wrote to Elgar ; 'that's why I try to write and spoil so much good MS. paper. When I get a good, solid attack of the "blues" I'm coming to you at Malvern—just to try and worry you when you're on a new oratorio. . . . No more to-night (being my Birthday).' And not very long after, he wrote of himself as 'unlucky in most things Forgive a short and stupid note : I'm rather sick of everything for the moment.'

Very few, however, heard that note from him—perhaps only Elgar.

It was at Queen's Hall that he made friends with Elgar : such friends, that Elgar was soon writing to him on a particular sheet of paper 'because there's an awful blot on the back and I cannot use it except for a familiar spirit.' These enchanting letters, full of warm affection and boyish gaiety and awful puns, came from the saddest of laughers, and merriest of disappointed men. Edward Elgar had been born rather out of his due time. He could have flourished

in the great days of oratorio, to which his religious bent inclined him ; but oratorio was becoming old-fashioned. In musical fashions, as in all others, there is a snobbery of modernity as well as a genuine impulse from changing conditions ; and Elgar was wounded by the feeling that his art was denied recognition by mere stupid refusal to see merit in anything but the new. His temper was deeply tinged with melancholy, and he was very well able to sympathize with the sentiment that life is a blight : so much so, that while he condoled or complained, he laughed. To be complaining to a friend—how gay that was, compared with the colour his thoughts took when he was alone ! Percy Pitt had not the disease nearly so badly, but he had enough of it for them to understand each other very well ; and his soberer gaiety, although it was a camouflage and not, like Elgar's, a confession, made another link between them.

' Love, Edward ' was the scrawled conclusion of Elgar's letters to him, which often ran holiday-making off into sheer nonsense. One of his comical effusions related to a matter in which Percy Pitt was accustomed to make himself useful at Queen's Hall. If, in his early days there, ' the dilatory Jacques ' lagged in supplying the programme analyses, Percy Pitt would go after them, and never fail to secure them. When secured, however, they were more and more found to consist of what one critic called ' odd little notes,' and presently Pitt was writing them himself. He and Arthur Kalisch wrote them for years for Queen's Hall, as well as elsewhere. It was a business which called for some tact, to judge by Elgar's reaction :

' To PERCY PITT, Esq.

(*alias* the Cosmopolitan,

„ „ Bottomless Pit, etc. etc.)

and to A. KALISCH, Esq.,

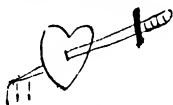
(otherwise the Carlist

„ „ Andelusion, etc. etc.)

these, more in sorrow than in anger. Be it known that all is over between us. (Mark that !)

The undersigned reached home last night and for the first time saw sundry musical notes and aspersions (good !) perpetrated by the said Pitt and Kalisch for and by a concert (dated March 16) to wit :

p. 1. What is an Encyclopædia ? there is something sly in this : nicht wahr ? passing over the fact that accelerando does not require such a L of a lot of letters as it is given on p. 42. The writer is



pained to observe, on p. 11, the following impertinent and horrible phrase—“ which *almost*, Almost, ALMOST (Damn it all !) ALMOST *assumes* (assumes ! look ye !) the importance of a theme.”

Hm !

Now : this is too much.

N.B. (1) All my ideas are themes ; (?)

(2) All my themes are important (??)

(as to other people's themes, enquire round the corner)

Ergo, Pitt and Kalisch are—(???)





I—to write in the first person (very) singular—pass over such mild jokes as to put H.D.J.P.—he (Var. II)

is not a J.P. but a respectable member of a University Club and therefore worthy of respect not only in St. James' St. and Regent's Park but also in Kensington and Earls Court.

I am grieved thus to spank budding analysts but my duty calls me on : a certain dignity must be upheld and programme books etc. etc. etc. but

—"Almost assumes"—

"Almost *ass—ass—ass—assumes.*" It does stick somehow ; Kalisch wrote that—I feel it ; I know it ; it burns into my—no—I'll burn *IT!!* Hurrah ! now it goes into the fire. "LOGE Lieber !" (Pause) After all perhaps Pitt wrote it ;—and then—I have a buzzum ; *is* Pitt a SERPENT : Have I folded him to me and now, fired with the genial warmth, he stings ? (Note by A. K. "'Tis true, 'tis pitty, and pitty 'tis, 'tis true.") "*Almost assumes.*" Alas ! to think that 2 friendships should lie buried under 13 letters—but that's an unlucky number.

Well ; I'll look over it this once ; my  shall be shut to your plural baseness and open  to your good will. I am going to send you both a memento of this auspicious occasion *soon*—but not yet.

Strewth.

Yours, as you demean yourselves

EDWARD ELGAR.'

After which came a drawing of two persons suspended from gallows and a final "Assumes !" Ha ! Ha !

The thing had 'almost assumed' the dimensions of an oratorio. 'Dear, dear ! how a Festival can alter folks !' Percy Pitt retorted slyly, as he thanked the indignant one for his 'four pages of bad language.' That was after the success of the *Apostles* had at length crowned the labours, which had so long kept Elgar away from the magic circle.

If it was not quite within its bounds, it was at least through his employment there that Percy Pitt made another dear friend. To his celesta, or to Tchaikovsky, in whose composition he played it, he came to owe 'a debt of gratitude which it would be difficult to repay.'

Tchaikovsky's *Casse Noisette* suite had been introduced to London by Henry Wood at one of the Promenade Concerts, and immediately became extremely popular. In the fourth number, the 'Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy,' occurred the part for the little keyboard instrument, whose exquisite purity of tone had, since its invention by Mustel in 1886, so much recommended it to composers for passages where a particular quality of delicacy was wanted. It was this part that Percy Pitt played, not only at Queen's Hall, but almost wherever the *Casse Noisette* was performed in London. Indeed, he was ungrateful enough to refer to it as 'the beastly *Casse Noisette*,' when it prevented his hearing the first performance of Elgar's *Gerontius*. But from one series of concerts the suite was, for long, excluded; for 'the Doctor' was not fond of Tchaikovsky.

The Doctor was a very great man indeed: the first, it has been said, of the *prima donna* conductors. He had begun his career by playing the horn in Viennese orchestras; since then he had held and indeed heightened the very highest musical positions in Munich, Pest, and Vienna. The perfection and the prestige of the band of the Vienna Opera House was due to him. But Dr. Hans Richter's particular glamour, for a large part of his audiences, was in his association with Wagner. He had been the com-



ARTHUR KALISCH

[Photo Mayall]

poser's assistant in quite early days, and had made the first fair copy of the *Meistersinger*, and conducted the first rehearsals of the *Ring*, and been decorated with the Order of Maximilian by King Ludwig of Bavaria after conducting the Bayreuth Festival in 1876. He had also been one of the foremost influences in introducing 'the music of the future' to England. In spite of his reluctance to cross the Channel—which he would woefully promise to do 'if the sea does not swallow us up or if I do not lose my nerve at Calais'—he gave to England a great part of his time and a generous measure of his enthusiasm; and English critics had learnt to admire the 'delicacy and precision' of Richter's conducting, his wonderful skill in bringing out the subtlest effects without prejudice to the grand whole, all with his strong decisive beat and 'absence of fussiness.'

The conductor seldom enjoys as much fame with the general public as his colleagues the singer and composer. It requires a good deal of musical knowledge to distinguish the qualities of his art; but among those who know he receives his due: and no conductor's glory in the early nineties was more glorious than Richter's. He had conducted the 'Richter Concerts' in England since 1879, amazing the world by giving long works by Beethoven and other masters without book, and in 1897 had taken a house near Manchester in order to direct the Hallé orchestra; after having begun his English career in 1877 by conducting, alternately with the composer, such Wagner concerts in the Albert Hall as had dismayed the young Percy Pitt.

Now that Percy Pitt had become a Wagnerian him-

self, a sudden prospect of contact with Wagner's great lieutenant renewed his alarm, for an opposite reason.

I suppose [he wrote of the *Casse Noisette* suite] that the managers of the Richter concerts must have induced him to include it in one of his St. James's Hall programme schemes ; at all events, the suite was put into one of them, and I was duly engaged for my Sugar-Plum Fairy dance. Of course I had for many years been acquainted with the distinguished Viennese conductor's work, not only in London but also in Bayreuth, but I had never come into personal contact with him, and although I accepted the engagement joyfully, I began to feel extremely nervous as the date of the rehearsal and concert approached, even to the extent of considering whether I might not be able to get out of it altogether.

Being frightened is not a bad preparation for music-making : some effects indeed, in any of the arts, being hardly to be got but by quivering nerves. The Doctor was won by the delightful rightness of the little performance ; and Percy Pitt gained not only an influential well-wisher, but a warm friend.

The terrible Doctor, in his late fifties, was a thick-bearded, genial being, as earnest as a boy, as thorough as a German, as hard-working as a cart-horse, but simple, kind and friendly. He hated noise and motor-cars, and liked fishing (from the shore) and skittles ; and his style, when addressing his young friend, warmed from ' *Lieber Herr Pitt* ' and ' *Ihr ergebenst* ' to ' *Lieber Freund* ' and ' *dein alter Hänschen* .'

Another eminent friend, Ysaye, was also much in England at the time, accompanied, sometimes in both senses, by Busoni, the prodigy whom Percy had met in Leipzig, now a leading pianist and a famous

exponent of Liszt. Percy Pitt also invariably accompanied the provincial tours of the two artists, whom Robert Newman had early championed at considerable financial risk and even loss. Ysaye was a great artist in every sense of the word, and when, upon a visit to Nottingham, he left his trousers and white tie behind, the crisis was acute. Newman's trousers were a bare possibility—'you might make a joke about that,' as the Gnat said—but only on condition that Ysaye refrained from sitting down during the evening. Percy Pitt went forth and bought the longest white tie in the town; but on his return in triumph he found that his friend wore 'open collars of some extraordinary outsize, probably 19 or 20 inches,' and the thing would not tie. They were not defeated. Some great brain conceived the idea of cutting the tie in the middle and lengthening it with—no, not tape, ladies—violin-string; and the odds are that the brain was Percy Pitt's.

Another time the trouble was Busoni's. Packing in the middle of the night, weary and excited, to catch the only available train, he heard a strange, small sound, like that of some elfin violin. He paused to listen—silence. He set to work again: again the mystic sound. A very little more convinced him that it was indeed a supernatural visitation; he rushed wildly forth: to find Ysaye, aware of his superstitious weakness, at work with a little old dancing master's 'kit' in the corridor.

It was pleasant to see these great artists, literally unbuttoned. Geniuses at play also abounded in an institution which has since disappeared, the Hôtel Dieudonné, in Ryder Street, St. James's.

It was owned and managed by two widowed sisters, Mesdames Dieudonné and Bainzlin, and run as a glorified boarding-house in the most approved French fashion, with the table d'hôte in the middle of the dining-room presided over at each end by one of the two ladies, and small tables on either side by the wall. It had a marvellous clientèle during the London musical season, not only on account of its great comfort and quite superior cuisine, but also by reason of its close proximity to St. James's Hall ;

and numbers of great foreign artists frequented it.

It was their real home from home, in fact a thoroughly Continental corner of London with the perfection of cooking, the so-called '*cuisine bourgeoise*' which is the real thing, and a wonderful cellar of wines.

Like most Englishmen who have lived on the Continent, Percy Pitt was capable of appreciating good wine and good cooking. 'If one called to see a friend at any time during the season one was always certain to run into any number of artists with whom one was already acquainted, or to whom one had been introduced.' He made a slight acquaintance with Tchaikovsky here, among others.

In 1902 his expanding acquaintance and growing reputation opened to him a new arena.

CHAPTER VI

Things Operatic

In 1902 occurred an event extremely momentous for Percy Pitt ; or rather it had begun to occur in 1901. In that year he had been asked by George Alexander to write the incidental music for his forthcoming production of Stephen Phillips's *Paolo and Francesca*.

He retired to Westgate-on-Sea on a short ' holiday,' having got in some preliminary work on it, and did it.

Stephen Phillips had just taken the town by storm. His dramatic poetry was all the rage ; Beerbohm Tree had put on his *Ulysses* with incidental music by Coleridge-Taylor, and his *Herod*. *Paolo and Francesca* was to be the most complete thing, artistic in every detail ; Percy Macquoid was to do the *décor* ; Henry Ainley, a beautiful young actor new to London, was to be the young hero, and Alexander himself the jealous elder brother ; and it spoke well either for the actor-manager's musical perception, or his capacity for taking advice, that he should have chosen a musician with a strong dramatic vein as yet practically unexploited. The young composer attacked the task with enthusiasm. It was his first commissioned work ; and, happy as usual, he conceived the greatest admiration for the play, and indeed for Phillips's verse as a whole. He was so much carried away by his ardour,

and by his operatic sympathies, that instead of simply writing the usual incidental music, he produced a complete *mélodrame* or practically continuous accompaniment to the play. Besides the usual prelude and *entr'actes*, and the songs, marches, and other music to be performed by the personages on the stage, 'whole stretches of the poem were underlined musically'—a proceeding which he regarded as 'a development of the treatment to be found in the case of the incidental music composed by Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Tchaikovsky.' Thus the first Prelude, whose latter part, with themes C and F—respectively 'Giovanni' and 'Festivity'—represented the rejoicings upon Giovanni's approaching marriage, 'leads without break into the opening scene of Act I and only finishes with the entrance of Francesca.' The themes of the second Prelude are those associated with the heroine, 'and a second theme, to be heard again in the scene which takes place between the lovers in Act IV.' The two remaining Preludes illustrated the lovers' passion, increasing and increasingly fatal: 'at one moment we hear Francesca's theme, at another that of Paolo forces itself upon our ears; but ever to be interrupted by sounds of gloom—the motives of Fate or of Death, depicting musically the awful doom towards which the two lovers are drifting': and the music was sometimes designed to be continued throughout entire scenes.

The poet was some whit dismayed, like Lord Cranston when he found the Goblin Page unexpectedly at his service. Phillips not unnaturally took the view that his poetry was good enough by itself, and looked upon music during its recital as a mere disturbance.

Alexander was enthusiastic for the music, but was obliged to compromise, with the result, of course, that neither author nor composer was quite happy. He was lucky in having a mild-mannered pair to deal with. Phillips's temperament was not vivacious, at any rate at that period of his life. He was, his surprised collaborator wrote,

one of the most extraordinary, taciturn and un-get-at-able men I have come across, and like so many other poets and literary men, just the reverse of what one would expect them to be. To read the glorious and wonderful verse of some of his works—for instance the poems, particularly *Marpessa*, and *Paolo and Francesca*, his first play in order of writing though produced after *Herod*—one would expect to meet a man of enthusiasm and quick imagination. Not so, however, for rather did he give me the impression of apathy, lethargy, or anything else that makes for heaviness.

He expressed himself politely about the music, but gradually succeeded in cutting a great part of the *mélodrame* out ; but some of it was retained, a half-and-half proceeding which detracted from the artistic unity of the production.

The cutting and slashing that went on at rehearsals [wrote the suffering composer] was simply awful, and to make a long story short, out of 300-odd pages of score, the people at the theatre use about 100—all my treatment of representative themes, my attempts to illustrate dramatic situations, in short, the effects I had striven to obtain go for nothing. The poet and the actor-manager have taken a fancy to some commonplace portions of my work and they 'trot' these numbers in over and over again. And then, the elastic eight-bar phrase (mine are generally com-

posed of 10, 11 or any number)—well, I won't worry you with all this lamentation.

On the first night there was such a thick fog that it clouded the theatre. Lateness in the circumstances might have been excusable ; but the management, determined to treat the piece as a serious work of art, closed the doors when it began. The house, nevertheless, was quite full ; though those who filled it, excited by their tribulations and the novelty of the play, were even more chatty than the usual first-night audience, besides coughing in the fog.

I shall hope to hear it again [an admirer wrote to Pitt] under less distracting conditions than those of a first night, when it is almost impossible to hear the *entr'acte* with anything like proper effect. *When* will audiences begin to realize that the music belongs to the piece and is a most important factor in creating in the mind the proper atmosphere for what is to follow ? To hope for this, however, is to hope for an audience of artists.

And his friend Arthur Kalisch wrote, ' With congratulations I must join condolences on the obvious mutilations it suffered and on the way in which a first-night audience made it impossible to hear properly.' Whether the audience listened or not, it applauded vociferously ; and the piece was soon ' drawing enormous audiences nightly,' and ran for six months.

The event started a controversy of some interest about incidental music. As to its quality, praise was practically unanimous ; it was ' by far the most important contribution to theatrical music which has yet appeared in London ' ; it was ' more suggestive

and appropriate' than any heard before ; and, impressing without obtruding, seemed to be ' felt rather than heard.' In short, if it was to be done, it seemed that it could not have been done much better. The question was, what part exactly should music play in such a setting ? Some felt that music accompanying the speaking voice spoiled two good things. These attributed the peculiar intonation of the actors to the supposed necessity of competing or collaborating with the music. Others maintained that the poetic drama was trying to do more than human speech was capable of doing : that it was straining, by means of imagery and speeches which violated probability, to express fully the emotion which words could never do more than suggest. The actors' intonation was set down to their striving to be ' superhumanly emotional.' Music, it was argued, was the proper medium for making audible what was entirely inward. The poet was accused, especially in the garden scene, of ' violating a silence ' which music could have beautifully filled ; and in this scene particularly, after the ' many beautiful examples of *mélodrame* ' earlier in the play, the music was definitely missed.

Perhaps the theoretical question was one which did not need deciding. There seems no reason why music and poetry should not be combined, theoretically, in any proportion ; the whole question, about any work of art, is not whether it is according to Cocker but whether it comes off. Tastes must always differ ; but there were evidently some in the audience upon whom a poetic spoken drama, in which music took part not only as an accompaniment but as a beautiful additional voice, would have made the

desired effect. One certainty, however, did emerge from the experiment, and that was that such a drama required the complete collaboration of poet and composer. Written as it had been written, it really needed to be docked either of some of the words, or of some of the music ; and the right to be heard, in the circumstances, lay rather with the poet.

He expressed a wish that they should collaborate again. They often met inside the theatre and outside it, lunching together with Alexander or at Guffanti's restaurant, which in Ryder Street had succeeded Madame Dieudonné's pension ; but Percy Pitt found that 'it was always hard to rouse Phillips from a kind of apathetical stupor, at least that is how it struck me.' He became more and more 'elusive' ; and their last attempt at meeting was when Pitt went down at his invitation to lunch and talk business at Brighton, and found on arriving that he had started for London half an hour before.

Alexander gave several readings of the play for charities, with concealed orchestra and chorus, at which most of the deleted music was restored. It was performed too as a suite at Queen's Hall, but definitely lost by dissociation with the drama. Its technical qualities were even more fully recognized than at the theatrical performances—where attention was concentrated on its dramatic fitness—and were praised as superior to those of any Englishman's work except Elgar's ; in that respect he was regarded as having 'surpassed himself,' and produced 'a masterpiece.' As music it was recognized as having 'many of the elements of greatness' ; but it had not been sufficiently telescoped for the concert hall, and appeared

too long and too redundantly tragic. It was nevertheless received with great enthusiasm, and the composer was described as being 'haled or hauled, probably the latter,' to the platform to acknowledge the applause.

The attention attracted by this work led to two more theatrical commissions. Pitt composed a song or two for Alfred Austin's *Flodden Field*, and the incidental music for *Richard II*, both produced by Tree. The former was given in the same summer of 1902, at a charity matinée at which the King was present, in aid of the funds of Guy's Hospital ; but it was a wretched play, and its reception was not such as to encourage a second performance. The mounting was beautiful ; otherwise Percy Pitt's song, sung to the harp by Miriam Clements, was the only feature which the critics found worth mentioning. *Richard II* was one of Tree's most spectacular productions, and had a long run. Warned by his previous experiences, Percy Pitt confined himself to the usual prelude and *entr'actes*, and to the music necessary to the action, which was ample enough, including as it did a march, dances, and coronation music with a *Te Deum*. Though distinguished as usual by its technique and by its close adaptation to the subject in hand, it did not give him the same opportunities as Phillips's play ; and no doubt some hearers thought it better in being entirely subordinate to the drama.

Mr. Pitt's incidental music for Mr. Beerbohm Tree's announced production of *Richard II* [the *Pall Mall Gazette* had observed beforehand] will be looked forward to with considerable interest. Mr. Pitt is a musician who seems to have so great a dislike for commonplace in art that he only ventures afield when

he is convinced that he has something worth saying in music. Of course such an attitude somewhat detracts from a large popularity ; but there is no doubt that a position such as this makes for the purity of art, whether it be that of letters, of painting, or of music.

The opinion is not unquestioned, that the position of being able to work only when the spirit moves him—the position, that is, of economic security—is good for the quality of a man's art. Free from commercial consideration such art may be ; but there are a great many other things from which the spirit can only be purged by the strongest internal effort ; and it has been maintained that nothing but economic necessity will force an artist or any other man to work hard at anything. As usual the truth seems to lie on the middle line, with the admission that both financial freedom and economic slavery have their own advantages and their own dangers. If a man is not compelled to earn his bread he needs some greatness not to become finicking and dilettante. If he must keep himself alive by art, some of what he turns out must be hack-work, and he needs some greatness not to allow his best work to be infected. Perhaps the most favourable position for giving the best that is in him is precisely what Percy Pitt's had been for the past few years : the position of having to work for bread at something else, preferably a subordinate branch of the same trade, while enjoying sufficient leisure to follow his heart's ambition.

Financially secure Percy Pitt was not ; but he had work which would have sufficed for his own need, had that been all. He had, however, other liabilities.

His family needed his assistance. Upon this subject, upon whatever sacrifices were necessary, whatever compensations afforded, he was throughout life as silent as the tomb. That makes the inference the more probable, that his situation caused him some distress. Artists are notoriously vexed by practical cares ; Percy Pitt had sufficient business sense not to have brought them on himself by carelessness or by extravagant self-indulgence ; nevertheless, he could not escape them. The quiet idealism, to which it seemed that life should be not only music-accompanied, but itself like a strain of music, grand or gay or simple, but always moving in order and harmony, suffered under this hidden trouble. Reserved and sensitive, he was the last man in the world to speak of his own private cares. ' I have known Percy Pitt for twenty-five years,' a friend said later, ' and I know no more of his affairs than I did the first day.'

In 1901 his father died, and he moved to Regent's Park Terrace, where his mother could live with him. The new house was a good deal bigger than his bachelor quarters, and caused him some alarm. ' Grooss 'Ouse Regent's Park !! ' (i.e. ' *Gruss aus* ') he wrote to Elgar, ' and later perhaps the Bankruptcy Court ! . . . Yours in deep sorrow, affliction, and emptiness of Geldbeutel ! ' The post card bore an elaborate picture of Diana hunting in a wood, which he called ' this little view of our Park.' The risk had, however, been taken at a lucky moment ; for 1902, which had already seen the *Paolo and Francesca* production, still held that which made him look back upon it as an *annus mirabilis*.

He had earlier made the acquaintance of Neil

Forsyth, secretary to the Grand Opera Syndicate, through whom he had been put on the free list of Covent Garden, and had been enabled to hear opera two or three times a week, either as a seat-holder or as a 'rover.' André Messager, too, its musical director, became a friend about this time. It was a pleasant connection ; for opera had been his first love, and he could not forget her among the paler nymphs of suites and symphonies. In 1902 the managing director, widely known as 'Harry Higgins,' who 'was, and always had been, anxious to lend a helping hand to British musicians,' approached several composers to find out whether they had done, or would like to do, an opera suitable for Covent Garden. The fate of this suggestion was odd. The non-performance of works by British musicians was a standing grievance ; yet no one seemed to leap at the opportunity. One of them, however, probably Elgar, called Higgins's attention to the *Paolo and Francesca* 'mélodrame' ; and Percy Pitt duly arrived, by appointment, to discuss the matter with him.

They talked at Covent Garden, they talked at lunch, they talked most of the afternoon. It was not only about the possible opus. Higgins knew a good deal about opera ; but he had met his match. They talked about opera in general, about the past season, about the répertoire, about the artists, about new singers, about what was being done on the Continent, about what had been done in time almost immemorial, about the opera's past, present, and future. No other head, Higgins realized with astonishment, could carry all Percy Pitt knew about operatic things. Percy enjoyed the chat too ; and it ended with the assurance

that, if a suitable libretto could be found, Covent Garden would commission him to write an opera.

If.

That this extraordinary libretto could never be found was another mystery in the story of British opera. Perhaps the very ardour of his desire made him too hard to please. He could not write the book himself ; English authors were a stable of dark horses as far as doing it was concerned ; but even the story was never decided upon. He and Higgins both sought diligently ; Elgar was kindly ‘ poking about in old plays ’ from Lope di Vega down, and promised ‘ we’ll find something not too bluggy and yet alive for you if you’ll only be good and patient.’ Pitt’s experience of opera had convinced him utterly that ‘ the best of music can never redeem a bad libretto.’ Alexander Mackenzie’s first opera, *Colomba*, written for Carl Rosa and performed at Drury Lane in 1883, had been so badly received, principally owing to an unsuitable book, that he was deterred for many years from that branch of music. Sullivan’s *Ivanhoe*, though it had an initial long run, due maybe to his prestige, ultimately suffered from the weak libretto and was little performed. Weber’s *Euryanthe* was a historic instance. When, after weeks of search, Higgins rang up again to make another appointment, Percy Pitt leaped to the conclusion that a wonderful ‘ book ’ had been found, and that the game was at last in his hands. ‘ Of course I was to be disappointed—it was a foregone conclusion.’ The disappointment was only partial. Higgins had not found a book ; but he was offering instead the appointment of musical adviser at Covent Garden.

The duties were those of musical coach, assistant stage conductor, and general musical adviser.

The functions attached to the latter position included a certain amount of travelling on the Continent for the purpose of hearing and engaging new artists : attending operatic premières and revivals of importance : and generally concerning oneself with all the details which go to prepare an operatic season.

He could have wished nothing better. 'I felt,' he wrote, 'that it was a step in the direction of my ultimate goal : towards that particular side of music which had always exercised a magnetic attraction for me, and for which I felt I was better suited than for the more severe symphonic side of art.' A step in the direction of the special work, for which so many sides of his nature designed him, it doubtless was ; but a step in the direction of his own opera it was not. Covent Garden was a great institution ; and those who serve monsters of that kind find themselves gripped by an exacting power.

The third Covent Garden theatre, which in 1856 rose on the ruins of its two burnt-out predecessors, was built, in spite of its size, rather for luxury, according to the standard of the time, than for crowds. It was a place for the great—indeed, for the Norfolk giant, as one paper observed complacently at its birth. The unwonted comfort of having elbow-room was a great theme with the press of the time. The house seated at first only 1,698 persons, later increased—sinister symptom !—to 1,952 ; and the stage area was very nearly as large as the auditorium, being 120 feet wide and 90 feet deep from the footlights to the back wall, although all this was not of course included

in the scene visible to the audience. The melancholy period following the death of the elder Gye, while his rival Mapleson gradually declined, and speculators at Covent Garden lost their money, had come to an end in 1888, when Augustus Harris leased the Opera House, determined 'either to resuscitate Grand Opera or give it a decent burial.' He had succeeded in resuscitating it, following the traditional policy of securing subscribers among the aristocracy, headed by the Prince of Wales ; and being also lucky in the material available. Jean de Reszke, who had earlier sung almost unnoticed as a baritone, blossomed out as a marvellous tenor just in time for him, and Melba made her début, though not a sensational one, at the same moment. The brief eight years of his reign included the 'Mascagni era.' On his death in 1896 the Grand Opera Syndicate was formed.

It was a small syndicate whose shareholders were represented by a board consisting of the Marquess of Ripon, Lord Esher, Lord Wittenham, and Mr. H. V. Higgins, the chairman and managing director, later joined by Baron Frédéric d'Erlanger. Percy Pitt's friends, André Messager and Neil Forsyth, were respectively general manager and secretary-cum-musical director-cum-business-representative. The Syndicate was regarded as wanting something of its great forerunner's enterprise ; but it kept the flag flying and remained solvent, and no opera company could well expect to do more. The support, as aristocracy declined, was not what it had been ; the costs were enormous, both those connected with the singers—Patti, in one of Harris's last seasons, received £400 a night—and the other expenses of the great theatre,

whose staff numbered between 700 and 800 persons. It certainly was not in the position referred to by the *Pall Mall Gazette* as making for the 'purity' of art ; financial considerations necessarily determined its policy, and explained its caution ; but neither was it an enterprise to which men could be tempted in the hope of making a fortune. Genuine enthusiasm had gone to its creation, and great traditions lent it their countenance ; and Covent Garden was a name of glory and glamour when Percy Pitt entered professionally the old theatre which is now awaiting its end.

CHAPTER VII

Covent Garden

‘ A cold winter’s morning in 1903, with a heavy suggestion of fog, an equally cold open stage in the midst of which were to be found a director or producer and his staff—four musicians and a stage pianist.’ It was Percy Pitt’s first introduction to the stage of Covent Garden, and he and his colleagues were about to start the scenery rehearsals for the *Ring*.

He was beginning his work as a producer ; and that it was not light might be guessed, but could not be realized with anything like completeness by anyone unconnected with the theatre. The complicated labour of producing an opera combined the several labours of producing a play, a concert performance, a ballet, and a pageant, into the grand labour of producing them as a single whole. It was the combination of all these elements which meant the hardest work, and needed the highest skill : the whole being not only greater than the parts, but less manageable. He himself described the preliminaries of production, in an article left in the rough and never published, called *Leaves from an Operatic Everyday Book*.

There are no doubt many people [he wrote] enjoying operatic performances and particularly first productions of new operas, who have little or no idea as to the amount of labour entailed in the careful

preparation of a novelty ; who probably imagine that one has only to play a work through a few times in order to learn it, and then immediately proceed to give a performance on the stage. I only wish it were as easy as that ! It may be of interest to some to be taken step by step through the rehearsal and preparation of an opera for public performance.

We will suppose that a new opera never before performed has been selected for production.

The first step is to arrange meetings between composer, author, conductor, stage director, ballet master, scene-painter, costume designer, in fact all the heads of departments : when the preliminary details concerning the choice of artists, broad outlines of scenic and costume requirements, etc., are fully discussed. And following upon this, the composer and conductor instruct assistant conductors and chorus-master in matters of tempo and interpretation of the music, before the real work of rehearsal with singers and chorus is started.

In the meantime, coloured sketches are prepared and submitted by the artists in charge of the costumes and scenery ; and, in the case of the latter, models to scale, mounted upon a miniature stage, are made, in order that nothing may be left to chance, and that this very important side of the work may be studied from all points of view : entrances and exits of artists, grouping and position of choral masses, stage bands, ballet, etc.

When the musical solo rehearsals with artists are sufficiently advanced, the ensemble meetings are taken in hand, beginning first with principals only until such time as it may be deemed advisable to combine them with the chorus. From this point the stage director, who has been busily working out his own plan of campaign, starts to rehearse with artists and chorus, beginning separately and finally taking the whole company upon an empty stage with the

necessary practicabilities, entrances and exits indicated by forms, chairs, tables, or anything handy which happens to be about.

The scenery models having been duly approved, the carrying out of this work is relegated to a small army of painters under the supervision of the head scenic artist ; and, when finished, the backcloths, cut-cloths, borders, flats, and what not are brought on to the stage and fitted into their various positions or altered as may be found expedient.

Now the electrician has to get busy, and settle his lighting plot with author, composer, and stage director ; and a correct vocal score of the music with different musical clues for the hundred-and-one ' effects ' is prepared for the assistant conductor, upon whom devolves the control of the lighting. This is a most important side of operatic or in fact of any stage production, and one that is frequently much neglected. It is supervised by the head electrician—in conjunction with the above-mentioned musician—from a large switchboard generally situated on the prompt side of the stage, the most favourable position for observing and checking the effects which are being produced.

Having arrived at this stage of the proceedings, we now approach the full rehearsals, i.e. those in which orchestra, soloists, chorus, ballet, in fact all concerned in the work are brought together ; for one must not forget that the conductor, besides supervising the various solo and ensemble rehearsals, has meanwhile devoted sufficient time to the orchestra to make its members thoroughly conversant with the work in hand.

During these full rehearsals, the opera is gone through with every care and polished both vocally and orchestrally until it is considered to be fit for the final dress rehearsals, which are preceded by a so-called dress parade. There, every costume, head-

dress, shoe, buckle, etc., has to undergo the most minute scrutiny, not forgetting the very important matter of facial make-up, to which too much attention cannot be paid. At this point then our new opera may be said to be ready for production before the public.

Such was the work involved in a new production ; but it was very little less in the case of ' the so-called répertoire or stock opera—*Aïda*, *Carmen*, or any other well-known work ' ; indeed, to a director who really cared for his art, such standard operas were

if anything more difficult to treat than the less-known ones. Of course it is possible [Percy Pitt wrote] to work on the traditional or hide-bound lines which have obtained for decades ; to be content with standards of production which have become obsolete. But to obtain any semblance of reality and natural feeling whatsoever—an end hard to achieve in the case of many standard works—one must work on modern lines as regards scenery, costumes, stage direction, and lighting, thus lifting the operas under treatment out of the rut into which they have sunk and giving them a fresh lease of life and a further chance of making their appeal to the public.

And when one considers how difficult it is to free one's mind from impressions and associations once fixed there, it is easy to understand that the staging of a stock opera was quite as troublesome, while not as interesting, as that of a new one.

When Percy Pitt wrote, however, that he ' wished it was as easy as all that ' to produce an opera, he was using a mere rhetorical expression. The stage at rehearsal with its bare boards and casual packing-

case furniture, the shirt-sleeved stage hands, the draughts and gloom, the frenzied confabulations, the effects which would not do and must be altered immediately, the plaintive composer and the masterful conductor, the expensive stars and the humble bandsmen, made up an atmosphere which warmed the marrow of his bones. The place was full of people who had spent years in it and had become pleasing natural features of the building. The head carpenter was an old 'character,' a Scotsman named Affleck, whose temper and language were a great source of joy, to all but his immediate underlings. Pitt laughed to remember his dilemma when the stage was reconstructed and re-equipped.

When the work had been completed in the course of a very severe winter, it was Affleck's business to direct the manipulation of the rather complicated machinery by his staff; and owing to the rigorous weather, in days when steam heat had not yet been installed on the stage, it was not long before he was attacked by a very bad cold and laryngitis, which robbed him of his voice. Affleck, an extremely hard task-master with a rich vocabulary of expletives, had badgered his men and put their backs up on many occasions, and their joy at his voiceless condition may be imagined. However, the old man was not to be done. He determined to carry on with the work, and, procuring a police whistle, he evolved a code of whistling to apply to the various manœuvres with backcloths, battens and other machinery. All went well for a short time, but one fine day there was absolute chaos. He could get nothing done. The more he blew, the wilder grew the confusion. Red in the face with rage and blowing, he was absolutely helpless. At last he had all the carpenters called

down to him on the middle of the stage; and, addressing them in a husky whisper, he croaked out, 'If this whistle could only repeat what I would like to tell ye, it wadna be fit to put in ma mouth!'

The stage contraptions with which Affleck and his unfortunates had to deal, on that cold morning when Percy Pitt began work with them, were unusually complicated. Wagner's operas, with their supernatural effects, required an exceptional outfit of mechanical devices and ups-and-downs of all sorts. 'The stage was a veritable death-trap with its bridges, open "cuts," swimming machines, Valkyrie horses, etc.,' and those on it carried their lives in their hands—or heels. The worst moment was when the Giebichung's hall was due to fall in ruins, a catastrophe which Pitt swore he had never been courageous enough to stop for. He gave the necessary signals, and fled into a property-room. One night, indeed, during a public performance, a part of it elected to fall into the orchestra, where the musician who played the large brass instrument familiarly known as 'the Upright Grand' saved his life beneath its massive shelter

The season of 1902, which was ending when Percy Pitt was appointed, had been a particularly brilliant one, including Caruso's début in *Rigoletto*. For its 1903 sensation the Syndicate was giving two complete uncut cycles of the *Ring* tetralogy, 'with an entirely new production, and under the musical direction of Dr. Hans Richter.' That the operas were to be presented uncut was no doubt an effect of the Doctor's enthusiasm; and their enormous length made a further innovation practically inevitable—namely,

timing as at Bayreuth. The *Rheingold* was to be given without any break, the other three were to begin at 5 p.m. or 4 p.m., with a long dinner interval between Acts I and II, and a shorter one before the last act. The first cycle was to be given independently of the actual season, that is to say a week before, on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, the theatre remaining closed upon the intervening days : which all made it seem still more unusual and momentous.

This was only the third occasion in his long career that Richter had conducted opera in London. The others were as far back as 1882 and 1884. 1882 was the year when the first ‘avalanche of German opera,’ as Hermann Klein called it, descended upon London. It was in the nature of an accident : Carl Rosa giving four Wagner operas in English at *Her Majesty's*, Newman four *Ring* cycles with Bayreuth artists conducted by Seidl at Covent Garden, and another German company twenty-four performances of German opera under Richter at Drury Lane. As opera seldom paid in any circumstances, this was too much for it, and all three enterprises lost heavily, as did also the regular Italian season that year at Covent Garden. Sufficient interest, however, had been aroused for Richter to conduct another German season at Covent Garden in 1884, and to inspirit him to the ‘Wagner in full’ enterprise of 1903.

It was as an assistant in a mighty task that Percy Pitt began his directing career ; but he and Richter got on excellently together, and increased in mutual affection and esteem. The Doctor could, of course, speak English, though with occasional variations, as in the famous tale of his taking the railway tickets—

‘one for me to come back, and one for my wife not to come back’—and his instructions to the orchestra to play pizzicato ‘with the meat of the finger.’ Nevertheless, Percy Pitt’s knowledge of German and of the Continent, and his cosmopolitan sympathies, formed a link between him and a musician of equally broad temper and of a reciprocal feeling for England. They were alike in kindliness, in good humour, in single-minded enthusiasm for the work.

Richter [wrote Bonavia] was, like all great conductors, something of a martinet. And yet I never heard him say a rude word. He could look daggers : but no one who played under him could fail to be far more at ease than with a less exacting but also less competent conductor. He inspired confidence in the players, who soon discovered that a more able or a more truthful chief they never had : one who was not afraid to acknowledge a mistake if he happened to make one (which was not often), who realized their difficulties, who could apportion praise as well as blame and honour merit wherever it was to be found.

He was very strong on the necessity for ample rehearsal, and no detail was beneath his attention. Percy Pitt’s correspondence with him was chiefly occupied on both sides with technical topics, with soloists and instrumentalists, with the First Violin and the Third Oboe.

I forgot one thing in my last letter [the Doctor would write] : the fair-haired cellist, who displeased Messager too by not always attending to business. *No mercy* for such people ! How many excellent hard-working musicians are waiting for employment ! . . . We must seek out the best [he wrote] and as many

Englishmen as possible. They have always proved themselves the best and most reliable—and besides we are to a great extent making our living out of them,

i.e. the English. He found Percy Pitt as thorough and reliable as the rest of his countrymen.

The great undertaking of 1903 went off admirably ; the *Ring* performances were ‘busting,’ Percy Pitt wrote to his familiar spirit Elgar, ‘—but there, I need not tell you how great Richter was . . . The opera season was all right,’ he added, ‘as long as the German repertoire lasted, but the last month of *Rigoletto*—*Faust*—*Romeo*—*Manon*—to say nothing of *Maguelone*—left an unpleasant taste in my mouth !!’ Playing stock and safety—neither he nor the Doctor thought Covent Garden was meant for that. The two enthusiasts had already laid their heads together, about a scheme which the Doctor referred to darkly as ‘our plans.’

During the summer and autumn seasons Pitt was busy functioning as ‘musical coach, adviser, stage conductor, organist, etc.,’ and in the intervals drafting plans for the next season, selecting operas and casting them. In the winter it was his congenial task to travel on the Continent, hearing operatic performances, and securing new operas or new artists. Sometimes he dashed off abroad at a moment’s notice during the season itself, in order not to miss something special. It was hard work, wearing work, but delightful ; although artistically so far from ‘pure,’ that the high æsthetic line was always finding itself absolutely blocked by some strange extraneous object, a chunk of granite commercialism, or a human

body declaiming that it would be run over sooner than move an inch. Percy Pitt was, however, the very man to deal with these obstructions: with the minimum of agitation, and with crowbars and coaxing rather than dynamite. He had seldom an absolutely free course. 'I am still enthroned at the opera,' he wrote to Elgar, 'but shall be abdicating about Wednesday next when Higgins returns from the U.S.A.' Whether Higgins was present or not, there was always the Board to consider; and the Board, small blame to it, had a certain Philistine penchant for solvency, and was apt to cast itself for the rôle of wet blanket.

The singers were just the opposite, and would go up in flames on the smallest provocation. Percy Pitt used to say that things were nothing like as bad as in the old days: that there were never any such scenes as that in New York, when Minnie Hauk and Marie Rôze both insisted on having the best dressing-room, and *Figaro* actually began with Cherubino sulking in her hotel, whence she was retrieved just in time by the threats of lawyers: that stars did no longer insist on being paid before they opened their mouths: that *prime donne* did not tear his eyes out, nor tenors seek each other's lives. It was a wonderful instance of the spread of civilization, if so. But perhaps it was partly because Percy Pitt was on the spot. Most people behind the scenes thought it was. The 'distinguished service to opera in England,' with which Sir Dan Godfrey in his memoirs credited him, consisted largely in 'dealing with the various artists of other countries whose temperaments have from time to time created exceedingly difficult situations. Undoubtedly owing

to the perversity of the artists many performances would have had to be cancelled but for Percy Pitt's tact.'

That trouble was not unknown appeared from Pitt's own recollections, in spite of his loyal assertion that in his day singers 'were beginning to behave quite normally.' Since a singer becomes a singer entirely in virtue of a voice, and requires no other qualities, hardly even intelligence, let alone intellect or general education, it is not surprising that there was occasionally heavy weather among the stars—those 'celestial bodies,' as the dictionary calls them, who, as Percy Pitt slyly observed, were sometimes 'not all *that* celestial in body!' Even he could occasionally sigh that 'times have been so roaring lately with all these singers and other furriners that I pine for a peaceful life.' Some poignant recollection inspired his tale of the diva, who in a moment of cerebral activity asked him why Othello murdered her in the last act—'I could only assure her that I thought him perfectly justified, and wondered why he had not done it earlier in the evening.' He had a story to tell about a lady who wished to have her own way on the stage.

Selma Kurz, a soprano from the Imperial Opera, Vienna, whose charm of manner and good looks were only equalled by the beauty and flexibility of her voice, was engaged to sing 'coloratura,' or in plain English florid soprano parts, an important one being Oscar, the Page in Verdi's *Masked Ball*. In the last act there is a celebrated song, '*Saper vorreste*,' in which the last refrain is preceded by a shake on a high note, and in order to create a new effect, the lady hit upon the idea of prolonging this note more or less

indefinitely, at all events long enough for her to stroll from one side of the stage to the other. That this did *not* please the conductor was immaterial to her, although at the dress rehearsal Mancinelli, who was in charge of the performance, pulled her up. She affected to give way, but when the fateful song was reached at the first performance the *prima donna*, feeling that she had the conductor at her mercy, proceeded to play her old tricks. But she had reckoned without Mancinelli, a martinet. Instead of pandering to the lady's whims he went straight on with the performance, bringing in orchestra and chorus, and leaving the Page stranded on her high note !

The 'slanging matches' which ensued were unprintable, but the diva never sinned again, at least not at Covent Garden.

Even Percy Pitt admitted that the discipline of that theatre might have had something to do with the ladies' docility. The pressure was not as effectual as that which he had formerly seen operating in Germany,

where nearly all theatres are Government institutions. There [he wrote] the artist is engaged to do certain work and has to do it. Any infringement of contract sets a whole machinery of fines and other punishments in movement, and as all the theatres are affiliated members of one big Union, any faults committed against the discipline of one particular theatre are duly recorded in the books of the Association.

Perhaps it was the exasperation bottled up under this inhuman system which burst out elsewhere. But Higgins was not the man to stand any nonsense. A

certain famous *prima donna*, Percy Pitt related, had been giving endless trouble

by feigning illness and pretending that it would be quite impossible to appear at a gala performance commanded by King Edward ; but of course did appear and had always intended to. Next morning Higgins took her on to the stage, and, telling the fly men to raise the curtain, said, ' Covent Garden auditorium is beautiful, isn't it ? '

' Yes,' she said, ' of course it is.'

' Well,' he continued, ' take a good look at it.'

' But why ? '

' Because,' said Higgins, ' this is the very last time you are ever going to see it from where you are now standing ! '

That directors were grown so bold was in part due to the improvement in the general standard of performance, which freed them from complete dependence upon a very small number of outstanding singers.

As we know, [Percy Pitt wrote] it was customary in the past to find one or perhaps two artists of this type in the cast of an opera whilst the remaining singers were negligible, both vocally and otherwise. In the days when I first became associated with opera, old methods were beginning to die out, things were righting themselves artistically, and the later years of the nineteenth century, and the early years of the twentieth, saw a gradual but distinct change. It was not that audiences were becoming tired of the sound of the human voice : on the contrary : but they were not satisfied with voice alone. And then again I think that the fact of latter day composers having made greater demands on their interpreters, both of principal and of smaller parts, has been responsible

for a great deal of levelling-up in this direction, and let us be thankful for this !

The philistine conception of a performance as a mere setting for an individual performer, rather than a balanced artistic whole, was 'just the thing we have been trying to do away with, at all events as far as matters operatic are concerned.' That the phenomenon known as the 'star' should ever disappear entirely was, however, too much to expect. Glorious voices are not so plentiful, that whole casts can possess them ; and if one occurs, it *must* naturally have the best rôle ; and the public *will* come on purpose to hear it. So, however milder manners might prevail, and great singers be different from the lady whom Othello so justifiably strangled, the stars themselves, when Percy Pitt began to deal with them, had never been thicker in the operatic sky.

It was still what Hermann Klein called 'the golden age of opera.' Albani had made her last appearance at Covent Garden in 1896, and the de Reszkes in 1899 and 1900 ; but within a few years before and after Percy Pitt's appointment there had been many interesting débuts, of which perhaps the most important were Ternina (her London début) 1898, Saleza the same year, Scotti 1899, Bonci 1900, Caruso 1902, Mary Garden's first London appearance the same year, Titta Ruffo 1903, Destinn, Selma Kurz and Sammarco 1904. Calvé, Eames, Brema, Kirkby Lunn, van Dyck, van Rooy, Renaud, Plançon, and Journet were still or already singing. As for Melba, she was a charming Institution. She had first sung at Covent Garden in 1888, and for twenty-five years thereafter sang there every summer season, as regular



NELIE MEIBA

in her coming as the swallows. Percy Pitt first met her in 1903, when she brought him a young American soprano, Elizabeth Parkina, for an audition. As a result Melba asked him to coach her in *La Tosca*, a part which she wished to add to her *répertoire*. He found her delightful to work with, hard-working and intelligent as well as a thorough artist. She always arrived practically note-perfect at the earliest rehearsal calls for a new opera. In 1904 he directed the first production of Saint-Saëns' *Hélène*, written expressly for her, though not one either of the singer's or composer's best performances. He also accompanied her at musical parties, and they became good friends ; for the present it was 'Dear Percy Pitt,' though 'come to see me,' she wrote, 'because I *like you*.'

She quarrelled with him once ; but after a few days' coolness asked him gaily what he was 'sticking out his stomach for.'—'If you don't know, who does ?' was his reply ; to which Melba's peace-making rejoinder was, 'Don't be a fool, let's be friends !' She could be 'disconcertingly frank' ; and if, being Anglo-Saxon and good-humoured, she was not so terribly disconcerting as some foreign stars in moments of frankness, an occasional tinge of apprehension in managers and directors was betrayed in one of Higgins's letters to Percy Pitt. 'I have just had a long talk with Melba,' he wrote reassuringly, 'who is in a very good temper and quite reasonable. We shall have no trouble about Tetrazzini as far as she is concerned.'

Trouble among ladies ! Did not Percy Pitt say there was no such thing to be feared nowadays ? The voices of these two ladies, in any case, were so

different that they had no reason not to love each other.

Luisa Tetrazzini made her Covent Garden début (a little later in Percy Pitt's time there) in circumstances which no one could have envied. The daughter of a bourgeois of Florence, she had made a startling beginning in her native place by taking the leading rôle of Selika in *L'Africaine* at a moment's notice, and at the age of sixteen. She had been almost born singing, and had no tales to tell of early struggles or hard training. Her wonderful high coloratura soprano had surprised herself by taking E in alt during a performance, without being asked ; and it subsequently rose much higher than that. Her early success had been repeated in Rome and Petersburg ; and since then she had been for four years playing to enormous houses and receiving frantic ovations all over South America. And South America is a very good judge of music and things musical ; but—strange how such considerations creep into the most unlikely matters !—the South American States are not Great Powers, and their towns are not among the mighty cities of the world. Just as Berlin, with so little of the true spirit of music, was a city whose approval was positively necessary, so London, without any musical reputation at all, was the goal of every singer's ambition, and of Tetrazzini's. ' During all these travels,' she wrote, ' there was ever prominent in my mind, as in the mind of every singer or player, the desire to appear before large audiences in London and New York,' the former first ; for ' a singer coming to America with a great reputation from Britain might be assured of success.' And the reason for this was

not that London was a city of experts or of musical enthusiasts, far otherwise, but simply that she was 'the greatest city in the world.' Like one of those great ladies, who are to be met with among the leaders of fashionable society in all lands, who are neither beautiful, nor witty, nor smart, nor lavish in their hospitality, but yet are, in heaven-sent phrase, *ir* : whose approval is absolutely necessary if one is to arrive : into whose doors if one cannot pass one may as well abandon hope—so London sat serene in her prestige, and refused to know the plump, cheerful little Italian nobody.

Cleofonte Campanini, her brother-in-law, who had succeeded Mancinelli as Conductor-in-Chief of the Italian opera at Covent Garden, had occasionally mentioned her name and extolled her virtues [Percy Pitt wrote], but it was considered that there was no very great demand for this type of singer, as the operas which served as a vehicle for such musical fireworks had fallen into desuetude, except for two or three well-known examples such as *Rigoletto* and *Traviata* ; and as the lady had her own ideas with regard to her value and the fees she should command, ideas which were not shared by the Directors of the Syndicate, it had never been possible to come to an understanding with regard to her appearance in London. Apart from this, the operatic season in Buenos Aires is held during the summer months, thus clashing with our own, and naturally the diva was not inclined to lose the money for the purpose of making herself known in Great Britain.

No : the lady had an excellent business head, and was not inclined to sing in London without a fairly good offer : but she did want to, very much. In 1907 Percy Pitt persuaded the Directors into giving

an autumn season of Italian opera, 'and as it was impossible to secure the services of any well-known artists for the latter half, and as Tetrizzini happened to be available, it was decided to approach her.'

'Now,' cried she, 'came the event to which I had been looking forward from the days when I was a tiny girl gladdening my mother's heart by singing the operas while sweeping the stairs in my Florentine home. London called !' And she 'literally jumped and sang for joy.'

But the Directors were not jumping for joy. Their autumn season opened dismally, nor were box-office receipts stimulated by Tetrizzini's name.

Sad to relate [Percy Pitt found], the public was not at all interested in our doings ; indeed so bad was the outlook that after a week a hurried council of war was held, as a result of which it was decided to send a telegram to the artist suggesting that she should delay her first appearance until the following summer season of 1908.

An appearance in the 'Grand Season' was indeed a better offer ; but the poor girl, used to South American impresarios, took fright. She did not vouchsafe any reply to the sinister Mr. Higgins ; so a more insistent communication was dispatched,

which had the effect of drawing a very decided negative from the lady, clearly showing that she was determined to stick to the letter of her contract. It was therefore necessary to make the best of what was considered to be a bad bargain, and Verdi's opera *Traviata* was selected for the event (Saturday, November 2nd).

As nobody wanted to hear the lady, we were

forced to fill the theatre with free tickets, and never in the whole experience of my operatic career can I recall such an extensive 'papering policy' as was then pursued.

The poor diva herself, perhaps expecting a scene, or at least a chilly hostility, arrived four days before the performance 'with a certain air of determination which was very upsetting to us all'; but was instantly reassured when she found herself among English directors and English musicians, kindly and courteously making the best of the bad job. The house was at any rate full; and before the end of the performance its temper had mounted from apathy in a 'fierce crescendo' to frantic enthusiasm. Tetrizzini's appearances during the rest of the season packed the theatre; and at the end of it, loath to part with her, the Syndicate gave four or five concerts at which she sang with the same result. 'In later years our thoughts often went back to this season, and to the efforts we made to cancel the contract of an artist who not only more than saved the situation, but paved the way for future triumphs both artistic and financial.'

And though she had made so 'upsetting' an impression at her first arrival, on closer acquaintance Percy Pitt found her 'particularly charming.'

Caruso was another good companion. He was not only a very reliable artist, but a delightful creature to have about the place: larking about and playing practical jokes, lending the stage carpenters a hand with the scenery, scribbling caricatures on the backs of wings or the wooden frames of 'flats.' At that time it was customary for the principal male singers

and conductors to lunch together at Guffanti's, where, at the head of a long table set down the middle of room, the principal conductor presided over

the steaming soup tureens of minestrone, accompanied by the indispensable grated Parmesan cheese, the heaped-up dishes of spaghetti and risotto, the fresh boiled beef, and the chianti. Caruso was always the life and soul of these gatherings, and when he ceased to come to Covent Garden with the same regularity, the meetings were gradually dropped, indeed without him there seemed no reason for their existence.

In 1905 the first performance in England of *Madame Butterfly*, with Destinn, Caruso, and Scotti in the chief parts, brought Percy Pitt, besides the artistic pleasure, a new friend in Puccini. The composer was one of those who had had early difficulties. He had been on the verge of starvation, and had owed many a meal to the generosity of a Florentine *restaurateur*, who was a lover of music and gave the struggling young artists of the city, among them Puccini and Mascagni, the free run of their teeth. Puccini's most popular opera, *La Bohème*, which reproduced these conditions, had made such a bad start that he had actually thought of suicide. But he had persevered; and now, in the sunshine of success, he was a quiet, kindly being after Percy Pitt's own heart, without any traces of under-nourishment.

Pitt's own opera had not materialized; but his own work was not entirely neglected. He wrote a good many songs, often setting his favourite French poems, as in the *Sérénade* for Tetrizzini with François Coppeé's verses; or the poems of his friends, like the little *pastiche* for Francis Money-Coutts, 'Laugh at

Loving if you will,' which called forth one of Elgar's comical remonstrances :

' To PERCY PITT, Esq. :

WARNING !

It having come under the notice of the deponent (and subscriber—to the M.T. that is) that a part-song, with a suspiciously antique flavour, is alleged to be the compilation of one Pitt the said subscriber (subscription overdue) by these presents warns the said Pitt that he is trifling with the feelings of the advanced school.

This unmonied but powerful body observe with regret that the said Pitt is running in double Arne-ness (!) with a person, a word-monger, who is Moneyed in name if not by nature and fear the contiguity of the synonym of filthy lucre may end badly for both : the fare proposed for sustenance is a bit too thin—apples and pansies are somewhat flatulent.

The deponent nevertheless likes the effusion (good) and will recommend it to his friends.

Signed,

EDWARD ELGAR

what is a Mus: Doc: against his will and an admirer of P. P. by nature.

These were only spare-time trifles, though done, as Elgar's banter itself implied, with conscientious skill ; and though in 1905 Richter was expecting Percy Pitt as a guest in Manchester, 'for then the *Oriental Rhapsody* of a certain Herr P. Pitt is to be performed, which may perhaps interest you,' this *Rhapsody* was only the first movement of his earlier *Dance Rhythms*. But he was doing other things too. Adeline Genée

got him to write the music for her dance at the Cecil. In 1906 his *Fantasia Appassionata* won the second prize in Mark Hambourg's competition, and was performed by him: being described as 'an extraordinary composition played with extraordinary force and bravura.' In the same year perhaps his most important, certainly his most ambitious work was produced at the Birmingham Musical Festival, for which it had been commissioned—his *Symphony in G Minor*, dedicated 'in gratitude and affection' to Hans Richter.

It began its career under the title of a *Sinfonietta*. He called it that because it was only in three movements, and a regular symphony is in four. Its length, however—it took forty minutes to perform—the construction of the parts and the general treatment, made it, as all the critics observed, something too big for the title. The first impression made by the work suffered a little from the misunderstanding. It was played as the last item in a programme, in which it was preceded by Holbrooke's *Bells* and Elgar's *Kingdom*; and the audience, already almost surfeited with high seriousness, expected something light and miniature. Its high and noble atmosphere, its musicianly skill, its rich and complex orchestration, were recognized by all, and for the first time the thematic material was felt to be almost too abundant; but all were not fresh enough to absorb such riches. To some it seemed more strenuous than spontaneous, and overcrowded almost to weariness. Perhaps the ear of the hearer was already weary; for to others it appeared vigorous and passionate, miltonically condensed, and only too full and deep in meaning to be entirely

received at one hearing. The solemn spirit which pervaded it seemed to one hearer ' the usual five-act tragedy in which so many modern composers live and move and have their being ' ; another found in it a tone, which might have startled those who only knew Percy Pitt's serene and cheerful selflessness— ' a vein of regret, the attitude of a strong mind which recollects with fortitude, but realizes keenly that what might have been can now never be.'

He had had longer to wait than most eminent composers, wrote one critic, for his first Festival commission, but was rewarded by complete success. The *Sinfonietta* was heard in London a few months later, in January, 1907, at the Queen's Hall, after two postponements which disappointed music lovers. It had been expected with ' considerable curiosity,' and, placed in the programme between a Beethoven symphony and Bach played by Kreisler, was felt not unworthy of its company. The composer was prevented by business at Covent Garden from conducting it himself as he had done at Birmingham, but reached the hall before the end, and was received with an ovation. Praise was even higher than before, the note of dissatisfaction still rarer. When heard for the third time (to anticipate) at a Philharmonic Concert in 1912 as a *Symphony*, it was even more fully appreciated. Its ' lofty purpose and serious outlook ' spoke as strongly as ever, and, a good deal of water having flowed under polyphonic bridges, its ' rich and glowing orchestral colour,' instead of being felt almost excessive, was compared favourably with that of ' the most modern composers.'

The successive hearings confirmed one another.

The qualities of the Symphony were its combination of noble spirit and technical skill ; its deep thought and emotional profundity ; its thematic abundance and high-piled orchestration. The defects of its qualities, which no creation is without, were that among the hastening themes and crowding climaxes a clear impression of the whole was not easily maintained, and that its very fullness tended to create some effect of monotony.

To have produced such a work at thirty-six was to have given strong intimations of coming eminence. Who could doubt that Percy Pitt had a future as a composer ? It was odd and troubling, had there been anyone to trouble about it, that the Symphony should speak with such solemn fortitude of ' what might have been.' But people like Percy Pitt do not get anyone worrying about them. His sensitive reserve did not invite solicitude ; but, apart from that, he had accepted a part in life which never receives it. Those who make themselves generally useful, who help lame dogs over stiles, and smoothe the hackles of growling ones, never receive, and soon learn not to look for, help or comfort in return ; they are accepted as having no troubles of their own, since they are so much at leisure to consider other people's. Just as children never think of the grown-ups, their nurses and protectors, as having an independent existence, so we grown-ups ourselves view our neighbours in relation to our own needs, carelessly accept what they can give us, and ignore the rest. It must often have happened to Percy Pitt, when the silence of his office ceased to be broken by some indignant voice describing the enormous dimensions of some adjacent mole-

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hill, to think upon Temple's experience : ' Human life is at the greatest and best but like a froward child, that must be played with, and humoured a little, to keep it quiet till it falls asleep, and then the care is over.'

CHAPTER VIII

Richter and the 'Ring'

Percy Pitt himself had regarded 1902 as a sort of *annus mirabilis*, the year in which he first became connected with Covent Garden. 1906 was another.

There was to be a German season in the summer, principally Wagner ; and late in 1905 Pitt was hunting up new operatic blood in Germany. He collected among others 'a delightful lyric tenor of Russian origin,' Carl Jörn, for the particular purpose of singing in Cornelius's *Barber of Baghdad* and in a little one-act opera by the Hungarian composer Poldini, called *The Vagabond and the Princess*, which were to be given as foils to the rest of the repertoire. He came back in good spirits and got busy rehearsing his tenor and the rest, besides lending a hand with Wagner, and had brought them on nearly to performance pitch, when the Directors summoned him to the office to break a piece of news.

Dr. Richter had suggested his conducting the first performance of the *Vagabond*.

Conduct opera for the first time in the famous House, the only thing of its kind in England, indeed occupying an unique position in the eyes of Europe ! Conduct the first performance of a quite new work—how delightful of Richter ! A stock opera would not have been nearly such fun. He would actually

be, in fact, the first Englishman to conduct a new opera at Covent Garden during the 'Grand Season.' 'To say that I was elated does not meet the case, nor shall I easily forget my feelings when first I went into the orchestra to conduct the dress rehearsal.' On that occasion, the *Standard* reported,

Dr. Richter, quite simply and informally, asked the band to give a very talented and enthusiastic English musician the same support and attention they had ever extended towards him. They would readily own, he added, that the conductor's chair was not the most comfortable seat in the Opera House, but he was sure that Mr. Pitt would fill it with the greatest distinction. Dr. Richter then shook Mr. Pitt very warmly by the hand and the orchestra applauded vigorously.

The performance, on May 11, was perfectly successful, and he also conducted *Faust* during the same season. Another opportunity was to have been Tchaikovsky's *Eugène Onegin*. Richter's kind encouragement included a characteristic exhortation to thoroughness.

That you should be conducting the *Onegin* [wrote the mysterious Doctor] is an excellent step forward to our plans. But now, leave nothing to chance; you *can do it*, I will answer for that; only you must insist on the necessary number of rehearsals. In *this* case no rehearsal can be *too much*; any concession which is wrung from you may damage your whole career as a conductor. Good luck!

and again, 'Now once more: courage, self-confidence, and success to the *Onegin*!' Some hitch occurred, much to Richter's indignation—'Abominable!'—and

Campanini conducted that opera. Perhaps it was not much to Pitt's loss, as the work was never at any time in its career a success. A little later, when he was asked to deputise in a hurry, his refusing met with Richter's hearty approval.

You were quite right to refuse about *Carmen*. That opera is not difficult, certainly, but has some passages in the chorus which require plenty of rehearsal. In any case *never* deputize before you possess the complete confidence of the personnel and a solid well-established reputation. With this 'maid-of-all-work' business F——, with all his gifts, has done himself a great deal of harm in Munich; without rehearsals he conducted *Tristan* etc., *quite admirably*, when Levi of Munich was on leave; but no one really liked it except the musicians who were lazy about rehearsals, while the serious artists shook their heads ominously over the man who was satisfied with scamped performances, or at least would put up with them. Otherwise conduct *everything* now which is offered you: from Bach to Offenbach: so that you may get thorough experience in the handling of masses.

This was all very well, Percy Pitt may have thought—but how was he going to get a lot of conducting of his own, when he was so busy merely preparing operas for other people to conduct? His success with the *Vagabond*, however, led to his receiving the offer of an engagement as second conductor for the winter season 1906–7 at the opera in Nice. He was on the point of signing the contract,

when Harry Higgins one day sent for me to lunch with him in order to talk about what he described as an important matter of business. For the life of me I found it impossible even to hazard a guess as

to the exact nature of this business. I racked my brains trying to remember whether I had been guilty of anything particularly stupid in connection with my work—but all to no purpose.

He was quite off the scent. His friend André Messenger was resigning his post at Covent Garden to take up the musical direction of the Paris Opera, and the English Syndicate was offering his succession as musical director to Percy Pitt.

Messenger's dual position, too much for one man, was to be divided, and Neil Forsyth was to become business manager.

And now, as regards the producing side, Percy Pitt was at the top of the British tree. Unless he were left a fortune and enabled to get rid of it by starting an opera company of his own, he could rise no higher. How delightful it is, when after working, however happily, in a subordinate position, a man can at last have his own way ! when he can put his own ideas into practice, and do things as they should be done ! And how the vista of conducting opened !

All his own way, of course, he could not have. There were still what Richter called ' the Gentlemen of the Syndicate.' There was still—there always is—a shortage of money. These were damping considerations, and they were already all too familiar to Percy Pitt. He did not imagine that he could launch out into uncharted seas ; nor, with all his artistic enthusiasm, was he the man to whirl a terrified and half-submerged syndicate behind him like a boat harpooned to a whale. His gentle *savoir faire* took things as they were, and made the best of them ; it was not the creative force which makes them into

something different. His directorship would not be cataclysmic ; but it would be true, and sane, and sound.

After this eventful summer season he went holiday-making with a cheerful heart, and then immediately to Italy upon what Elgar gaily called his ‘ nightingale-hunting for Covent Garden, or at least—larking ! ’ The business was indeed pleasure, though chequered by the vicissitudes of the traveller. At Milan the August and September weather was hotter than anything he had ever encountered, and the sweltering auditions in the dal Verme Opera House were something to remember. But on the Continent one could always get pleasant evening meals in the open air, and there were long evening drives with Ettore Panizza or the Ricordis, father and sons, whom he had known since his early struggling days in London, or Franco Fano, ‘ prince of agents,’ another old friend.

He was to take up his new duties in the spring. As that time approached, an odd job in more senses than one presented itself. The Colonial Premiers were visiting England, and, among other festivities, were to be entertained at a grand banquet given by the 1900 Club at the Albert Hall. The Poet Laureate, as in duty bound, had written an Ode called ‘ England’s Welcome,’ and wrote asking Percy Pitt to set it to music. It ran as follows :

Welcome ! Welcome, yet once more,
Welcome unto England’s shore.
Faring hither from afar,
Southern Cross and Western Star,
All of British birth and blood,
Linked by loving brotherhood.

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One in heart, one in hand,
One in council and command,
Far as winds and waters reach,
One in purpose as in speech,
Facing fearless, good or ill,
One, but by unfettered will.

Closer, closer, let us draw,
Knit by Liberty and Law,
Severed nor by sea nor zone,
Loyal to one King, one Throne,
With Imperial Flag unfurled,
Proffering Peace to all the world.

Percy Pitt had less than a month for it, and he was a busy man. Nevertheless, he put his back into the work, for King and Throne, and produced something which seems rather to have abashed the poet, who thought that the setting was a little too elaborate for the—occasion. But it was a very grand occasion. Three thousand eaters were present, and consumed 600 pounds of fresh strawberries, 3,000 quails, 30,000 sticks of asparagus, and 13,500 bottles of champagne. The catering was by Lyons, and cost £2,000, presumably exclusive of wine. The Ode, which may perhaps have struck a rather alien note, was also sung at a banquet of the Eighty Club at the Holborn Restaurant.

But this, however sweet and decorous, was not his serious business. 'Our plans' were now ripe; and he had other fish to fry; even, as director, other fish than his well-loved foreign opera. He and Richter were the latest recruits in the noble army of enthusiasts for opera in English.

Others had fought in that cause; had 'fired their ringing shot and passed, hotly charged and sunk at last.' Still the forlorn hope came on. If the thing

could be achieved, it would work a complete revolution in the state of opera in England.

Since those first popular works, which were both English operas and operas in English, had been ousted by Grand Opera in Italian, the English language had never returned to the operatic stage. It had become a dogma, that Italian, the language of *bel canto*, was the only language which it was possible to sing in ; and, from the point of view of *bel canto*, it was. A language like human speech in liquid form : whose rich, open vowels seemed to have drowned all the consonants : which transformed words, harsh or metallic even in its sister Latin tongues, into a delicious gurgle—it was a language for birds and bells, for sobs and laughter. The Italian fashion was carried to such a pitch, that all operas, whether English, French, or German, were alike sung in England in Italian. Such a custom was death to the general popularity of opera ; but the great companies, supported by the subscriptions of the élite, felt no remorse. But even this limited appreciation was failing. The inner circle was thinning out, society was becoming larger and less cultivated ; democracy was now the patron to be courted, and democracy did not like what it saw of the business. Had the fashionable opera been in English it would not so much have affronted the too-literal common sense of the newcomers. To hear an Indian Prince on the stage sing love-songs in English would have been to Englishmen an allowable convention ; they were used to Shakespeare's English-speaking Frenchmen and Italians, and the justification was obvious—it was done in order to be understood. But even to more sophisticated English ears, there

was something odd about Massenet's *Scindia*, in his *Ré di Lahore*, addressing his dark lady with ' *O casto fior del mio sospir !* ' No, the whole affair was affected nonsense, and Englishmen did not care to pay through the nose for that sort of thing.

Moreover, it was not always easy to follow an unfamiliar story. Percy Pitt, at the Paris Opera, listening to the bridal chamber scene between Lohengrin and Elsa, heard his neighbour, who had come in late, inquire whisperingly ' what those two ladies on the stage were quarrelling about ? '

The first venture at reviving opera in English came, of course, from a foreigner. Carl Rosa opened first at Liverpool ; in 1875 he came to London. The task, however, was no longer, as it would have been at the close of the eighteenth century, that of developing a plant of native growth. The seed had died in the ground ; and now the problem was to introduce an exotic. What was wanted was a sort of operatic Woolworth's, a vast company which could give opera to the nation cheap before the nation was aware that it wanted it. Undertakings which were obliged to depend on demand in order to begin to supply were in an almost hopeless case. Municipal enterprise could have supplied opera, as abroad ; but then opera had first to create a demand among ratepayers. The several touring Carl Rosa companies did some brave work, and by no means without success. After the ' German invasion ' of 1882 there was a revulsion on high in favour of native talent, and, as it happened, the rising impresario Harris was at that moment in partnership with Rosa. Together, at Drury Lane in 1883, they gave with great success Goring Thomas's

Esmeralda, Mackenzie's *Colomba*, and Charles Villiers Stanford's *Canterbury Pilgrims*, the latter's *Savonarola* being performed at Covent Garden the same year. In 1885 there was another Goring Thomas success, *Nadeshda*. In 1888, when Harris took over Covent Garden, it looked as if English opera and opera in English might come into their own ; but Rosa died in 1889 ; and though Harris was chairman of the Carl Rosa Company for a short time, he was obliged to give it up owing to press of work, and at Covent Garden, under pressure from his patrons and in order to avoid difficulties with his singers, inclined again to foreign ways. The ' French craze ' had succeeded the Italian and the German, and even English operas, especially if sung by Melba and Jean de Reszke, were given in French.

The opportunity lost at Covent Garden seemed, for a while, as though it might be compensated elsewhere. Gilbert and Sullivan had begun their light-operatic career in 1877 ; the *Mikado* in 1885 was one of their greatest successes ; and they were popular from the start. Richard d'Oyly Carte, in 1891, began to build in Shaftesbury Avenue what he intended to be the home of ' Royal English opera '—now the Palace Theatre of Varieties. He began well with the long run of Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* ; but he had made no adequate provision for following it up, and the enterprise perished.

That English opera should establish itself at Covent Garden, or in a home of its own in Shaftesbury Avenue, was not the real end to be desired. The whole point, for those who loved opera and thought that the English nation would love and enjoy it too

if it really came to know it, was that English opera should be cheap and widespread. Only on those conditions could it be self-supporting. They believed that to popularize opera in English was the way to popularize opera in general, and that it would in fact open a door to the influence of music in a degree long unknown here. Opera, with its visible accessories and its dramatic stories, might be expected to appeal to a large public which would not as yet care for pure music ; but the habit of hearing operatic music would bring all the rest of that enriching and civilizing art in its train.

This could not be directly achieved by settling it in an expensive theatre in the metropolis. But what would be achieved, if English opera became fashionable in London, would be a state of things in which opera would be worth while for English composers—and also for English poets. The prejudice against English opera, which unfortunately existed among English opera-goers quite as strongly as the prejudice against foreign opera among English opera-refusers, was excusable in view of the hideous baldness of too many English libretti. The translations of foreign operas seldom compared even remotely with the originals. An opera English all through was what the country would be most likely to take to its heart ; and the first step was to persuade those who did go to the opera that English was a possible language to sing in.

That all operas should be sung *and understood* in the tongues in which they were written was indeed the ideal ; but as an ideal for the populace it was a very long way off, and only to be reached through operas sung in its own native speech.

No one was more enthusiastic for the idea of opera in English than the German Richter. He existed to extend the dominion of Wagner ; and he believed that it would be extended by translation. As regarded the suitability of the Teutonic languages for singing, Wagner himself had caused a change. His ‘ music-dramas ’ actually demanded a harsher language than Italian, not only because, like Scott’s mercenaries, ‘ in rugged tongue songs of Teutonic feuds they sung,’ but because his more realistic methods were incompatible with the bland *bel canto*. The Italian style, when it had to record the death of a hero, refused, like poetry, to ‘ set about imitating his dying noises,’ and he perished in an unimpaired suavity of tone which did not fit Wagner’s conceptions. Jean de Reszke at first sang Wagner’s operas in Italian ; when he took to singing them in German, his voice acquired a new and more virile quality. And what a German had done Englishmen, surely, might do.

Pitt and Richter, accordingly, were engaged in a conspiracy to foist the English language upon unsuspecting opera-goers. It was an appropriate endeavour for Percy Pitt, the first Englishman to hold the post of musical director at Covent Garden since Sir Henry Bishop, who wrote ‘ Home, Sweet Home ’ in the days of English opera, a hundred years before. Nor could anything have been more in keeping with Pitt’s ideals. He had found England a desert, in which music appeared only as an occasional refreshing shower, or a rare oasis ; and he had given himself heart and soul to the task of irrigating it. Whether by his own compositions : or by playing the celesta : or by accompanying other people : or by conducting :



DR. HANS RICHTER

[Photo: K. Seigler Studios]

or by soothing temperamental artists : or by getting up ladders in his shirt-sleeves : his one thought was to get the divine stuff to the thirsty soil.

Their first plan was an enterprise which gave a new connotation to the term 'English Ring.' The phrase had hitherto, in operatic slang, been derisively applied to the group consisting of *The Bohemian Girl*, *Maritana*, and *The Lily of Killarney*. 'This was probably the invention,' Percy Pitt wrote, 'of the same musical wag to whom we owe "Shoolbred's Unfurnished Symphony" and similar paraphrases.' Henceforward it was to mean 'Wagner's *Ring* in English.' The proposal was to give two cycles in the spring of 1908, without cuts, in English, and sung as far as possible by English artists.

From early in 1907 the two adventurers were busy consulting and corresponding. Richter was very firm about orchestra and artists, and no detail was too small for him.

I don't think we are making an unnecessary fuss : if Mr. — will let us have an audition, good : if not—no engagement. It is true that musicians were formerly engaged without audition ; but the result was that people got into the orchestra who had no business to be there. *That* must be avoided, and *I* insist upon it that no one shall be engaged without a trial.

The orchestral and choral sides presented no difficulty, of course [Percy Pitt wrote afterwards], nor indeed the smaller and secondary parts ; it was only when one had to think in terms of Brünnhilde, Sieglinde, Wotan, Siegfried, Siegmund, Alberich, Mime that one's optimism sagged a bit. After all, these were definitely heroic parts the like of which none of

our singers had ever tackled, or should I say ever had a chance of tackling? Much time was naturally spent on these important preliminaries; and though we could get as far as the Frickas, Gutrûnes, Erdas, Hagens, Hundings, there still remained some terrible stumbling-blocks, the Siegfried, Wotan, and Siegmund in particular.

Eventually they had to take the Danish tenor, Peter Cornelius, for Siegfried, who unfortunately knew very little English.

This difficulty was got over by inducing him to devote his summer holiday to the two rôles in *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, and by placing an English musician familiar with the work at his disposal for three months. For the part of Mime the Dwarf we could not find any English artist, and were obliged to fall back upon the German singer who had already played it for us, Hans Bechstein. The only other foreign artist was a Norwegian girl, Borghild Bryhn, whom Percy Pitt discovered governessing in London, and who sang Brünnhilde in the *Walküre*, sharing the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde with Agnes Nicholls, the Sieglinde.

A stroke of luck, the sort of luck which comes to those who earn it, gave them Siegmund.

Many years previously [Percy Pitt wrote] I had spent a few days at Brighton which happened to coincide with the first performance of an extremely charming light opera by Sidney Jones, *My Lady Molly*. Now it might not have occurred to me to go to this, but that I met Richard Green, one of my old operatic friends, who was singing the principal baritone part and asked me to come and hear the work on his account. A very promising young tenor was making his début on that particular evening, and altogether

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I spent a pleasant hour or so, what with Sidney Jones' delightful music and the general excellence of the company performing it. Later, in the preparatory stage of the *Ring*, I chanced to be invited to dine and go to the theatre by some friends whose tastes did not run to serious music, and in the musical comedy they had selected, *Miss Hook of Holland*, I found my young tenor again. In an interval of seven or eight years he had improved to such an extent, that he struck me at once as the very man for the part of Siegmund. A few days later he gave me an audition at Covent Garden which more than confirmed my previous opinion, and it will now be no news that this young man was Walter Hyde.

No wonder that Richter wrote from the Austrian Tyrol in July, sending his 'heartiest thanks for your splendid exertions, which are for me the surest guarantee of success'; and to urge that 'it is all the more needful for you to get a thorough rest at Weibegg. Come when you will: as to "cook and cellar, shelf and store," there will always be enough.' Pitt spent some happy August days in the tiny mountain village, so out-of-the-way that the postmistress did not read handwriting very well, and Richter used to send small printed slips for his friends to address their letters with. In September the Richter children were 'still asking for Herr Mr. Pitt.' Herr Mr. Pitt had returned to anxious researches for a Wotan.

I often feel uneasy [Richter wrote in October] when I consider the great task and the short time. We must bear in mind that the piano rehearsals must begin early in January, the scenic rehearsal *at latest* on January 12, and the orchestral rehearsals on the 20.

His excitement was intense, when the Syndicate

showed signs of jibbing at the chosen Wotan as too expensive.

Tell Higgins from me : with Wotan stands or falls the English *Ring*. To save the *Ring* sacrifices must be made . . . For *this* English *Ring* only, we—the artists—must have the last word and not the finance minister, necessary and excellent as he is. There is too much at stake, to economize at the wrong time . . . Time is flying, and there is much, *very much*, almost everything to do . . . Wotan ! Wotan !! Wotan !!!

The Syndicate gave way : ‘ Saved ! ’ This Wotan, and Wanderer, was Clarence Whitehill, although he too was encompassed with difficulties :

he had always sung the parts in German at the Cologne Opera, which meant re-studying the entire work, and consequently it was necessary to get his director to grant him four or five weeks’ leave of absence on account of rehearsals. Incidentally too [Pitt found] this cost me a certain amount of annoyance in quick journeys to Cologne and back. I remember once leaving London at 4 o’clock in the afternoon and arriving at 1 the next morning, and returning again the same afternoon.

That old friend the Canadian Hedmondts was Loge and also producer ; Alberich, Thomas Meux ; Hund-ing and Hagen, Robert Radford ; Fricka and Wal-traute, Edna Thornton.

Percy Pitt’s memory played him false, when he said there was ‘ no difficulty about the orchestra ’ ; although naturally it was less desperate than the difficulties about the principals. The Doctor’s letters were full of horns and bassoons. ‘ How is Matt, the bass-trumpeter, doing ? ’—‘ Forsyth writes me that

M— asks too much. Is it quite impossible to make an exception for him?' 'I thought that a bass-trombonist was found who could play the C bass trombone ; Barlow could help him out with the very deep notes.'—There was a frightful story of a viola-player who was reported to be using a bow with 'seven hairs' to it ; which agitated the Doctor extremely. He was as exacting and unrelenting about these orchestral units as about Wotan. All through the autumn and winter of 1907 preliminary rehearsals were held daily, Richter keeping an eye on their progress when he was in London for the concerts of the London Symphony orchestra ; but even when all was ready for stage rehearsals much remained to be done, since a good many of the singers were concert artists with no experience of acting.

On December 5, 1907, a letter from the Doctor appeared in the Press. He spoke of the experiment about to be made, in giving the *Ring* for the first time without cuts in English, and of his hope and confidence in the performers.

An artistic success with the *Ring* would open a wide prospect : *the foundation of permanent English opera*. By that I mean performances in the English language. When, on my last visit to Bayreuth, I spoke to Frau Wagner of our English *Ring*, she greeted the plan with great enthusiasm, and added that a profound influence on the public was only possible through the *national language*. But there must be no narrowness ; the great masterpieces of the classical and romantic schools, the excellent existing works by English composers, must be conscientiously performed, and thereby native talent encouraged to produce new excellence. If this goal is reached, or at least the way prepared

for it, I shall have achieved one of my highest aims and embodied my gratitude for the hospitality, which has been unstintedly and unceasingly bestowed on me in this country for thirty years.

High-hearted Doctor ! No wonder Percy Pitt, too often besieged by the pettinesses of musicians, rejoiced to work with the colleague who could put the cause of art first in such a generous spirit of disregard for all barriers of nationality or anything else.

In December he was looking for a flat for the Doctor, who wrote professing reliance on his judgment, adding anxiously that ' the drawingroom piano *must* remain in *my* drawingroom ; there it will not be dangerous. The terms are not too high if, as promised, there is no piano in the neighbourhood.'— ' Merriest Xmas (too late !) ' he added. ' Happiest New Year (too early !) O that the birth of one man—and that not historically documented—should cause so much scribbling and squandering ! But I don't want to be jailed, so, silentium ! Thine old Hans.' He eventually found the lodgings ' very suitable and nice.'

' Here I am in my fine flat,' he wrote early in January, 1908, ' and cannot do better than write you my impression of the first general rehearsal. It was on the whole *very* satisfactory.' But one singer was not. ' God put everything in the man's throat, but forgot that a singer must have something in his head as well.' Trumpets and trombones doing well. ' But the kettle drums ! I am writing to Weber, the kettle-drum king ; he is indeed a hotel-keeper in Meran now, but perhaps——'

At a given moment [Percy Pitt wrote] Hans Richter took over altogether and really moulded the whole

ensemble into a marvellous state of homogeneity, both musical and otherwise. It was indeed a colossal achievement, and certainly one with which I was proud to be associated, not only on account of its passing success but because I felt it to be a step towards the realization of a dream, a wish which lay near to my heart—the establishment of opera in English on a firm basis.

The *Ring* was given in January and February, 1908, and was a tremendous success. Great curiosity had been awakened, and the house was packed with eminent people as on a 'Tetrazzini night.' The *Rheingold* was a triumph; with the *Walküre* 'the first night was surpassed.' *The Times* wondered whether 'the splendid standard set in the first two performances' could possibly be kept up. *Siegfried*, which the King and Queen attended, showed no falling off; and with the *Götterdämmerung*, at which the Queen was present again, Dr. Richter was said to have 'crowned his previous labours in England.' He and Percy Pitt were repeatedly called and cheered after every performance. For the second cycle the house was 'even more crowded than before.'

For a performance in which there was no 'star' unless perhaps the conductor, this was remarkable enough; though in truth the effect may have been all the better for that. There had never been any doubt about the possibility of finding good English voices; and the performances, as Groves justly observes, 'laid the foundations of many successful careers of English singers.'—'The best *sung* Ring,' Leo Schurker wrote, 'taking it all round, I have ever heard! and I *have* heard a good few in every land since

1876 at Bayreuth !' That English singers could also be dramatically equal to the occasion was now clear. The stage management was also appreciated, and more than one critic, with some apology for descending to trifles, mentioned the great improvement in the 'loathly worm,' which entirely outclassed the Bayreuth one both in its personal appearance, and its intelligence in coming out from the place where Alberich went in. But it was something more than these material advantages which made the whole 'exploit,' in its way, unique. In being an experiment it had become something of a crusade. There was a spirit of zeal for the cause, a holy fear, as it were, an effort to perform an artistic feat hardly believed to be possible, which gave a spirit and intensity to the whole ; while the balance and unity, which were the ideal of the two artists conducting it, were undisturbed by either the humours or the individual associations of particular performers. The effect was so marked that it everywhere received notice : the 'spirit of real artistic achievement,' the 'whole-hearted devotion to the object which all had in view,' was as highly recognized as Richter's genius.

More than one of the chorus and orchestra wrote to Percy Pitt expressing their pleasure in the work, their satisfaction at its success and at the reception the audience gave him, and their gratitude for the trouble taken by coaches and conductors. Another memento of the adventure was a silver cigarette-box inscribed 'A souvenir of the English Ring presented to Mr. Percy Pitt by the principal singers and musical staff, January 1908.' And Richter, writing to him from Blackpool to thank all who had co-operated in

the enterprise, wrote, 'I thank you first of all, for without your sympathy as an artist, without your assistance, perseverance, and energy I should not have been able to carry out the work.'

'*Auf Wiedersehen,*' he added, 'till the next English *Ring.*'

CHAPTER IX

Opera in English

The success of the English *Ring* was only the first step in 'our plans.'

It was such a good one that the Doctor thought the perils of the venture over. A venture it was, regarded with disfavour by many, by nearly all (as far as success was concerned) with doubt. We know that the performances were not faultless, could not be faultless; but what has been achieved promises highly and we may look forward to the future with good hope.

His programme for the next step forward was another cycle of the *Ring*, *Fidelio*, the *Meistersinger* in English, and a native English opera, preferably a new one which should have won a prize to be offered by Covent Garden.

The Doctor was getting on in years; and undoubtedly he thought of Percy Pitt not only as his adjutant at present but as his successor in the good work. His advice had been taken, and Pitt was conducting frequently, the same qualities which made him a heaven-sent accompanist making also for sympathetic conducting. 'Orchestral players loved him, because they felt safe in his hands; he would never let them down, nor they him.' Audiences shared the friendly feeling. When, during a performance of *The*

Prodigal Son and *Everyman* at the Shaftesbury, a rather long wait occurred, a voice from the auditorium called out, 'Hurry up, Percy!'—'His conducting methods were a trifle peculiar. He had a habit of burying his face in the score and waving his hands over his head like a gesticulating stag-beetle'; so that once when he had been thus lost to sight for about three-quarters of an hour of the first act of *Tristan*, one of the orchestra, relieved, exclaimed, 'Percy's come up to breathe!' The habit rather detracted from that personal magnetism which great conductors exercise, owing to the orphaned orchestra seeing nothing less abstract than a baton.

His conducting was, quite characteristically, celebrated not so much for anything new or strange which he put into or read out of the music, as for its penetrating sympathy and appropriateness. Letters from composers thanking him for his interpretation of their works were a pleasant and frequent experience. He conducted *La Bohème*, someone observed, with 'the sort of cuddling intimacy which this tenderly sentimental work demands'; but *Tristan*, under his baton, was a revelation to those who were used to him in Puccini, 'the climaxes being reached through perfect tempests of impassioned music.' And it was typical of his impersonal skill that at a performance of Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which he was conducting in 1907, one of the audience remarked that 'Richter was at his best to-night.'

The works which he conducted at Covent Garden were not always those which he would have chosen. The Syndicate preferred to play for safety. He had a disappointing experience over the *Tales of Hoffmann* :

a tale, for his part, which he told with some feeling, as all too typical of the trifles which shape our ends.

Some years ago my late friend, Georges Jacobi, lived in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park not very far from me, and I was constantly meeting him in trams, 'buses, and other cheap conveyances. He was at the time, and indeed had for many years been Conductor at the Alhambra. A very excellent musician, he had during the earlier years of his life in Paris taken part as a member of the orchestra in many interesting first performances and knew most of the prominent French musicians, amongst them Offenbach.

Upon one occasion when I called upon him during his convalescence after an illness, he drew my attention to the *Tales of Hoffmann*, with which I was unfamiliar at the time, and lent me a vocal score. I at once saw the great possibilities of the work, and brought it to the notice of the Syndicate, at the same time recommending that it should be included in the répertoire of the following season. By the same token, too, the late King Edward had witnessed a performance during one of his Continental holidays either at Homburg or Carlsbad, and had been so struck by its attractive plot and charming music, that he sent a message to a prominent member of the Syndicate—I forget whether to the Earl of Ripon or Lord Esher—requesting that Offenbach's work might find a place in the list of operas to be selected for the next summer season. Added to all this, my next Continental journey afforded me an opportunity of hearing a very excellent performance of the work at the Komische Oper in Berlin, then under the artistic direction of Hans Gregor, later to be Intendant of the Imperial Opera in Vienna, and this only served to whet my enthusiasm to a greater extent if possible. Upon my return to London, I reported so favourably

upon the opera that I was able to induce my directors to put the preliminary work in hand without delay, to which end an English translation was first prepared—this of course merely for the printed libretto book on sale in the theatre, as we intended to present the opera in its original French garb. The models for scenery, as also the costume designs were put in hand and passed, a tentative cast mapped out, in short everything was well on the way except for actually announcing the production as one of the forthcoming season's novelties, although I am not quite sure that certain paragraphs did not appear in the daily press. About the end of March or beginning of April, I had occasion to make a second journey to Germany and Austria in order to pave the way for some future arrangements, and had hardly terminated my business when I received an urgent telegram asking me to be in Brussels early the following morning to meet Harry Higgins and attend a performance of Offenbach's work with which the season at the Monnaie was to terminate on that particular evening. It was naturally a matter of travelling all night in order to arrive in time, but when I made my call on the Directors, it was only to discover that the performance in question happened to be the annual benefit for the Box Office Manager, an extremely popular person in the Belgian capital, and further that a telegraphed order for seats had not been dealt with as it had only arrived when the entire house was sold out. Here was a pretty predicament! A case in which nothing could apparently be done. However, my managing Director bethought him of a certain *restaurateur* in the city who could generally be relied on to help his patrons in difficulties of the sort, and it occurred to us that if we lunched and dined at his restaurant—incidentally one of the best in Brussels—we might succeed in achieving our ends. And indeed nothing seemed

easier, for directly we explained matters to him, he guaranteed that two stalls would be waiting for us by dinner time, but of course professed that he could not definitely state how much they were going to cost, to which we could only reply that we had made the journey with the express object of hearing this particular performance, and should have to place ourselves unreservedly in his hands as far as the cost was concerned. We left the place in a far more tranquil state of mind than when we had arrived, shaking hands with ourselves at having been extricated so easily from the fix in which we had found ourselves. When we sat down to dinner a few hours later it was only to be informed that there had been enormous difficulties in beating up any seats at all owing to Cloetin's popularity, and the best that could be done resolved itself into two *strapontins* for which 100 francs (£4) was demanded!!! For those of my readers who are not over familiar with French and Belgian theatres, I may explain that a *strapontin* is a little hinged board without back or support of any kind which is fixed to the end of each row of stalls by a spring attachment—really an apology for a stall—only let down in the case of an over-flowing house, effectually blocking all gangways, and certainly one of the most uncomfortable seats imaginable. In case of fire—well, it won't bear thinking about.

This was a bitter blow, but there was nothing else to be done, so we paid our good money, finished our meal, and made for the theatre where it meant practically a free fight to get into the house at all—a seething mass of humanity. Well, to cut a long story short, the seats were worse than uncomfortable, the performance particularly moderate, which of course did not matter so far as I was personally concerned, but severely influenced my companion; with the net result that all my good advice went for nought and the opera was ruled out, which meant the scrapping

of all preparatory work, libretto, plans, sketches, etc., the Offenbach opera being replaced by something else. And it then remained for Sir Thomas Beecham to produce the self-same opera during his first summer season at His Majesty's with phenomenal success.

It was Beecham who seized the opportunities which the Syndicate let slip. Percy Pitt's first contact with him was in 1909, when the A Division of the London Police Force, headquarters Bow Street, arranged to give a concert for a charity of theirs, the Police Orphanage. Mr. Thomas Beecham and his New Symphony Orchestra volunteered their services. Since the concert was to be given in Covent Garden Theatre, Beecham politely asked Percy Pitt to do part of the conducting. All was arranged, and Pitt was to start the rehearsals. He arrived with his usual punctuality to find assembled only a few stray members of an orchestra, apparently half-awake ; a few more dribbled in at intervals ; they had given a performance in the provinces the night before, and were tired out. In these circumstances, Pitt felt, he would rather not be responsible for the results of the morning's work, and he left the poor fellows to their slumbers. He heard no more of the matter ; so he was rather amused when later Neil Forsyth told him that Beecham wanted to see him to discuss ' further musical collaboration '. It was very easy, however, as the Mad Hatter might have said, to go further than nowhere ; and they were soon working happily together.

Beecham as an apparition in the world of music dated from 1906, when he founded his new Symphony Orchestra ; since then he had given concerts at

Queen's Hall of a strikingly modern and enterprising character. Delius was one of his composers. He had just made a start upon opera, in 1909, by producing Ethel Smyth's *Wreckers* at His Majesty's ; he now wanted and received Percy Pitt's help for a short 'international' opera season at Covent Garden in the spring of 1910. During the next few years he produced opera almost continuously, and with as much disregard for conservative prejudice as he had shown in his concerts—Delius's *Village Romeo and Juliet*, Clutsam's *Summer Night*, Debussy's *Enfant Prodigue*, d'Albert's *Tiefland*, Leroux's *Le Chemineau*, Strauss's *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Rosenkavalier*—and it was vexing to Percy Pitt that his own firm should leave these things to be produced by another.

Still, they were not exactly the game at which he was flying. Richter, though seen less and less in England, was still heart and soul in 'our plans.' In 1908 he had retired from his connection with the Hallé Concerts, recommending Percy Pitt as his successor at Huddersfield, where however the committee had already made its choice. He came over that year for the grand season, at which the 'sensation' was nothing more English than Glück's *Armide* ; but wrote afterwards from Bayreuth, 'Give them no rest about the English Opera plans : leave nothing to chance !'—a phrase which had become a kind of joke or catchword between them—'the success achieved must be profited by and increased.' His courage and ardour were undiminished, although he had 'sciatica in the right leg,' and was 'daily mishandled, that is to say massaged,' and his conducting at Bayreuth made increasing demands on his strength.

Here I am already up to the eyes in work. The orchestra the best for years : chorus splendid : many alterations for the better in the solo department too ; it can be made *very* good. I am conducting the 2nd *Ring* too. As Frau Wagner can no longer take part, i.e. undertake the supreme management, Siegfried (Wagner) is the manager, and I must not let him down ; so I shall come back to Bayreuth for the end of the cycle.

He wrote again with enthusiasm : ‘ Siegfried does miracles with scenery, costume, and stage management. If we could have something like that in London ! ’ He was not forgetting London. The personnel there, he urged, ‘ must be complete before you close. If that is achieved, we can give the English Opera in the Grand Season too. . . . What is this about the Mozart cycle ? As I said : The chief thing for us must be English Opera, which we must also give in the Grand Season ; but we must have everything prepared for it now. *Whatever happens no delays !* ’—doubly underlined.

Pitt wrote that he was resisting Mr. Higgins’s wish to give two other foreign stock operas. ‘ You are quite right,’ the Doctor replied, ‘ we must keep our business artistically “ pure.” No *Butterfly*, etc., in which our ingenuous artists—and we wish to keep them so—can discredit themselves, and ruin the English Opera as we conceive it.’ Throughout the year they corresponded anxiously about the singers, the kettle-drums, the coaching. ‘ We are having dry but *very* windy weather,’ the Doctor wrote apprehensively in September. ‘ Perhaps it will blow itself out now and we shall have fine weather for the crossing.’

He arrived, and then there was first some anxiety

about the cast—‘That you are obliged to be away just now is most unfortunate. Eva? Brünnhilde? Sachs? O God!’—and then a terrible excitement because Mr. Higgins would not give up his plans. ‘For God’s sake talk seriously to the man again. The chorus *cannot do it*! Our people will discredit themselves with *Faust* and *Butterfly*. . . . For the two above-named operas there must be routine, routine, and nothing but routine.’ It had even become

a devilish suggestion, hatched by hostile malice, to which the good Higgins has lent his ear . . . If we make a failure with our opera (which may be good, even *very* good, if we have all the rehearsals we need) it will be long, *very long*, before we make good the damage, and our enemies will rejoice at our discomfiture, which will not be *our* fault, but that of people who have no understanding for our art, and are not patriotic enough to feel that *English opera* has become a matter of honour . . . O, I wish you were back! Your anxious Hans Richter. Devil take — or whoever gave H. such bad advice.

No use.

Try at least to get rid of *Faust*. Meux has 2 *Ring-nights* = 9, Beckmesser in addition, probably the *Angelus* too—that will kill the man, our only Beckmesser. The choruses cannot do it. If the people are already engaged, then do *Butterfly* twice more, or three, four, five, six times more, if you cannot be rid of *both* operas. A ball to-day [he wrote from a hotel] and everything is dancing round and round in my head too. Please, please!

Another scare. A player in the orchestra was thought too dear; but this was got over—‘Thank God!’



GIACOMO PUCCINI

[Photo: Scattini]

Pitt was inclined to think that *Faust* would be less of an undertaking than *Butterfly*. 'Don't be cross,' the Doctor pleaded, 'I would rather have *Butterfly*, because there is very little chorus in it.'

Eventually *Butterfly* was given five times, and Naylor's *Angelus*, the prize English opera, twice ; three *Ring* cycles, four *Meistersingers*, and an extra *Walküre* on the last night. But the wish to include foreign stock opera, though temporarily half-defeated, had been ominous. In February, after the season closed, Pitt and Richter had a talk with Higgins, and laid before him a typewritten plan, which was met with the usual doubt as to the financial prospects of opera in English. This the confederates countered by proposing to appeal to music-lovers to guarantee the costs of the next winter season, an expedient by no means unusual, the Newcastle Festival for the same year being guaranteed up to £10,000 ; and they even thought for a moment of carrying it on as a venture of their own, if the Syndicate refused. A letter from Higgins, following up their conversation, gave the scheme its death-blow.

In it the Chairman declared that the general public did not want opera anyway. 'It is not a question of language at all ; the fact is that unless for some very special attraction, the London public will not come to the opera in sufficient numbers to make it pay . . . English people only come to the opera to hear something sensational or unusual.' Autumn seasons were always a loss ; and summer ones would be a loss too but for foreign auditors and 'the private subscriptions for boxes and stalls which depend to a great extent on fashion.' He calculated that the cost

of performances amounted to £550 per night, and would probably be nearer £600 ;

furthermore you must recollect that in this calculation there is practically no provision at all for new scenery, costumes, etc., etc., and if you were carrying on the season as an enterprise quite separate from the Syndicate who provide all these and charge them to their summer expenses, they would amount to a considerable sum. Wagner might be supported for a few performances ; but for the other performances, such as *Orfeo*, *Samson*, *Fidelio*, etc., if your receipts average anything over £300, you will be lucky.

Under these circumstances [Mr. Higgins continued] I am not prepared to recommend my colleagues, who rely to a great extent on my judgment, to run their heads against a brick wall. I advise you strongly not to make an appeal for financial assistance without making it quite clear that in all human probability a loss will result. If the Doctor likes I am quite willing in 1911 to introduce English opera as a feature of the summer season in place of German. It will be an experiment, but one that we can afford to make. If anything will give an impetus to opera in English, that will, but to continue to lose money on English autumn and spring seasons, when there is not even a remote prospect of the enterprise paying its way, is worse than useless and will injure the cause you have at heart. My conviction is that there is very little demand in England for opera at all outside the season, and that outside the small circle of those who have an axe of their own to grind, the idea that a craving exists for opera to be given in English is an absolute delusion. If we can do Wagner better in English than in German, by all means let us do it in English ; I don't believe the summer public will care one way or the other. We shall see how they receive the *Valkyries* in May.

It was a staggering blow to the enthusiasts. They knew well enough that opera did not pay, and that there was not a loud popular demand for it, or for any kind of music ; that was just the reason why they wanted it in a more popular form. They thought that it did not pay because nothing in it, except the orchestra, was ever English, born of the native genius of the country : neither composers, nor language, nor singers. Foreign, and hackneyed at that : what English theatre would ever expect to pay, which persisted in putting on *Egmont* and *Ernani* season after season ? Why Mr. Higgins consented to carry on with opera at all was indeed a mystery, in view of his conviction that nobody wanted it ; but at least it was clear that he had no missionary ardour, and that the Syndicate would not even help those who were mad enough to contemplate a financial risk in such a cause.

Percy forwarded the letter to Richter in woe and wrath.

Well ! So there we have it [the Doctor replied]. Higgins' letter is quite correct and sensible, he is right, but he is not far-seeing, and he underestimates the public feeling for art ; *our* works have made full houses and awakened the greatest enthusiasm, which promised abundantly for the future.—So much work, talent, keenness and perseverance to be 'snuffed out !' That Higgins dissents from the idea of an appeal to the art-lovers among the rich is a sign that there is no real wish for the establishment of 'opera in English.' Even the — Croats have an opera in their native tongue, and England——? . . . One hope—a very faint one—I still build on the English *Walküre* in the spring.

Percy Pitt did not at once give up heart, and

proposed to go on working and hoping : enclosing at the same time a list of the box-office receipts for the winter season of 1909. The English *Ring* had taken over £600 every night, except the last two nights, which were shortened performances, and the last-minute *Walküre* ; sometimes rising to over £700, three times to over £800, and once (*Walküre*, which probably produced the demand for an extra performance) to £978 8s. 7d. Puccini in his native tongue did not rise to £300 ; neither, it must be admitted, did the English composer's opera. Even with these dead weights the receipts for the season worked out at an average of £558 6s. 1d. per performance. This actually satisfied Mr. Higgins's conditions, and certainly did not indicate as hopeless a prospect as he suggested. ' *I will leave nothing undone, as long as I have your confidence,*' the Doctor responded ; ' your letter has done me good. . . . *Our performances—up to the two last short nights—were each time far above £600 ; what then are the cavillers grumbling at ?* '

But the reassurance, which the confederates drew from these figures, was in the circumstances fallacious. The less the Syndicate's reluctance could be justified by financial facts, the more probable it was that it was rooted in something less assailable : some prejudice or apprehension. People do not produce shaky facts except in support of strongly entrenched opinions. The Syndicate, which had always lived upon Italian opera, probably saw itself being torn from its moorings and sent adrift upon a shoreless sea of opera in English. Half-measures never pay, and they preferred the whole ones they knew to a whole set of new ones.

The poor little spring *Walküre* was in imminent danger. Pitt wrote somewhat listlessly from Paris in March. He was glad to hear how successful Richter had been at Leeds with his English singers in Wagner ; but as for the Covent Garden *Walküre*, he heard that the Syndicate could not get an English Wotan and were thinking of doing it in German with the English cast and a foreign singer. But since things had been so 'messed up' he had 'lost all pleasure in the business. And if various matters turn out as I hope, I will have done with Covent Garden at the end of the summer season! . . . I hear nothing about an English season in 1910, neither do I ask ; for I know already that — has put a spoke in our wheel.' The Doctor strongly objected to the proposed *Walküre*, and it was eventually done twice in English.

Was this the miserable end of their high hopes ? It was irritating, too, to reflect that Richter, with his position, Percy Pitt, as Covent Garden's musical adviser, would probably be actually thought responsible for the abandonment which they felt so bitterly. Richter wrote in a great state of mind because a certain Rose Koenig had published a pamphlet, in which it was stated that at Covent Garden there had been only one rehearsal of each opera as against twenty at Bayreuth. He wished the Syndicate to contradict it : 'Are we both, in addition to being left in the lurch by the Syndicate people, to have it said of us that we were responsible for the English rehearsals being shamefully scamped ? I will co-operate no further, if in this matter too we are to be betrayed and sold !' About this 'stupid pamphlet'

Pitt did not feel so strongly ; but still he conjured Richter to preserve all the facts about the whole matter in his diary, so that they would if necessary be able to establish the truth.

The retreat did not go unnoticed or unregretted by the Press. The *Observer* treated the subject with great vigour in an article of April 18, 1909, which Pitt sent to the Doctor.

The severest blow [wrote the critic] which has ever been struck at our pretensions to rank amongst the musical nations has been the abandonment of the winter season of English opera at Covent Garden . . . It was immaterial, at this early stage, that the only English opera by an English composer was critically, and with good reason, strangled at its birth. . . . It is almost ridiculously obvious that our composers, up to the present, have had no available means of acquainting themselves with the trend and scope of modern opera work, unless they were able to go abroad. Apart from the Wagner productions, the authorities at Covent Garden have for years persevered in the same old round, which has been principally dictated by the requirements of star-artists, who themselves have been simply the protégées of a late-dining, fashionable world . . . These things seemed in the way of being changed. Respectable novelties have been promised for the coming season . . . with the English stay-at-home composer afforded an opportunity of hearing modern work, and the English singer gaining practical experience in the winter season, the initiation of something in the shape of a National Opera seemed definite. Now the whole scheme has fallen to the ground. No more English opera ! And the same old story of lack of public support ! Many would like to know, of course, the amount of this deficit. I am not alone in believing

that we have music-lovers in our midst who would gladly guarantee any loss if the season were continued. The amount required would be moderate in the extreme

—and he added that the opportunity would have been lost, ‘all for a sum that has probably been wasted many times over during the year in the production of some stupid musical comedy or other!’

The disappointment and vexation seemed to have a definite effect on Richter’s health. That summer he found himself very tired, only then realizing ‘what demands I made on my nervous system last winter,’ and unequal to exertion—‘this d——d growing old!’ —‘We all regret that you cannot come to Weibegg,’ he wrote in June; ‘is it unalterable? Who will play shuttlecock with the little girls? Perhaps you will be able to manage it, after all? You are welcome, you know that.’ In the winter he would have been ‘glad to get decently out of this Covent Garden business; but they have my promise and have also my sympathy in their (mostly self-created) troubles. . . . I can’t let them down.’

The experience drew the two men even nearer together. The Doctor’s use of the second person singular expressed, Continental fashion, their intimacy.

I can well understand how you feel among all this slovenliness, although I had no idea it was so bad. For a real artist like you, who wishes to put his heart into his work, the conditions you describe must be torture. And what makes it more painful is the fact that the money is there with which all might be done properly, and in — certainly the good will too; but the man is ill advised.

What Percy Pitt felt was in part no doubt the impatience, which comes over a man when he has reached the prime of life and become master of his art, at not being free to employ his powers according to his own lights : a just and natural feeling, such as in the theatre leads actors to become also managers. He was, nevertheless, hard at work, and the consequent gaps in his correspondence drew a protest from the Doctor in the summer of 1910. ' Well, I wish someone could tell me whether my friend Pitt is still alive, and whether he is coming to Weibegg, and when ? Or has ink become so dear in England, that one must be saving ? . . . Thine in darkness wandering Weibegger ' ; and a day or two later, ' This is really carrying economy too far : after all, the ink and paper manufacturers must live. '—' Thine old foster-brother Hans, ' was another signature.

The year closed for them with a friendly incident, in which Percy Pitt was able to return the good Doctor's frequent kindness. Richter was anxious to see a particular book upon Wagner, which might be expected to clear up a debatable point about the composer's autobiography, soon to be published, but supposed to have been written or altered by another hand. It was known that only 100 copies of the book in question had been printed, for private circulation. It was written by the Hon. Mrs. Burrill (who died in 1898) and was issued by her daughter Mrs. Heniker Heaton in 1905.

I forgot to tell you yesterday [Percy Pitt wrote] I had already looked up ' Music ' (about the Burrill biography of the Master) and found that the book was printed by Wyon. Now, if it was possible for

Mrs. B. to get an extra copy from Bonfanti, we ought surely to be able to get one from Wyon ! In short, at a friend's yesterday I met a lady who knows Wyon well—sheer chance !—and asked her whether, if it was impossible to buy a copy, we might borrow one for a short time—she promised to speak to W. about it. So wait, perhaps it will be possible to get the work *at least* to read !

The Doctor was delighted, when a few days before Christmas a copy of the enormous volume arrived. 'Best thanks for the giant life-score. How long can I keep it? For reading it is very difficult owing to the unusual size ; to be able to read it I have to lay the book on the ground and myself too (on my stomach). Is a month too much?' But the next day he wrote again.

In my joy at having *the* book to read I overlooked the first page : Ludovica first called my attention to the fact that 'there's something else written.' But my dear, my wonderful, my wicked fellow ! You must explain this to me. It is not consistent with mortal powers. Where, when, did you commit the burglary? Well, *I* shall hold my tongue ! 'Was it sheer strength, or magic skill, by which thou wrought'st the miracle?' (Wolfram). Well : \$ (= 1,000,000) 1000 times ss da capo f Thanks ff Thanks fff con tutta la forza Thanks !

'I am now,' he added a little later, 'meditating calling in an architect to build a house round the book I owe to you.'

But in the same letter he once more expressed his sympathy and regret for the sabotage of their hopes.

I fully sympathize with your feeling. That an eminent musician, as you are, who is in earnest about

his art and is desirous, and capable, of the highest achievement, and has the necessary forces at his disposal for carrying it out, should be compelled in order to earn a living to take part in an enterprise conducted on other than artistic principles—that is the darker side of our otherwise splendid calling. Disheartening indeed ! If the people who ruined *our* English opera knew what they had destroyed, they would be ashamed of themselves. . . . So *this* is the future—probably also the end—of *our* English opera, so gloriously begun and in the following year so brilliantly carried on ! A pity for those gifted artists, who have worked with us so successfully and with so much promise and in such *unexpected numbers* ! How much we had done already ! I know of no country, no city, where in such a short time, without long years of preparatory work, such splendid results have been achieved, as 3 and 2 years ago. It was a crime of the worst kind, when the breath of life was forcibly choked out of our English opera, so capable of living.

So the Austrian Richter.

Was ‘opera in English’ a goal worth working for ? and could nothing have made it a going concern ? Perhaps the moment, when such a man as Richter, in a strange transferred patriotism, with such a lieutenant as Percy Pitt, was only asking to be allowed to work for it, was one of those tides in the affairs of men. Covent Garden preferred to play for safety. No doubt the artists had, like artists in general, an insufficient appreciation of the financial perils ; but perhaps in this, as in other matters, to save one’s financial life was to lose it.

It is a long time since 1910 : are these now such ‘old, unhappy, far-off things’ as can stir us no longer,

though in their day men strove and grieved and hoped for them? No : the question is still alive, opera as precarious as ever, a sort of Sick Lady of England, who always seems on the point of dying, who goes on like the cracked pitcher to the well, whose admirers still struggle and fail to bring her health and set her firmly on her feet. Pitt was beginning to think her a chronic case ; and he got little satisfaction from her at this period beyond his fees. He could not afford to throw those away. Whatever those hopes were, which he had hinted to Richter, they had not materialized ; and as for composing, he had been far too busy for that.

He had missed in 1909 a singular chance of keeping his name before the public. The Poet Laureate had again applied to him for a setting for some verses, designed as a March for Territorials. These lines, Mr. Austin modestly observed, were ' not poetry,' but were merely intended to be ' sung by the average good citizen.' He thought that he might possibly get them sung at the Alhambra, with whose manager he was acquainted, ' by a bevy of young women dressed as Territorials.' Perhaps Percy Pitt, who thought that the average good citizen ought to have good music, would have preferred also that he should be offered good poetry ; or perhaps the musical director of Covent Garden was left cold by the vision of a bevy of young women dressed as Territorials and singing his composition. At any rate the negotiations dragged. There was a difficulty about the refrain. At first it was to be ' Swinging and singing along ' ; but as that did not go, somehow, the Laureate suggested, ' For Country and King, for Country and

King, to fight for our Country and King.' Another refrain was later tried, and then the verses were recast ; but though Percy Pitt did write something, and also looked through some books of the poet's in order to find something else which he would like to set, the idea was eventually abandoned.

In May, 1910, Pitt's *English Rhapsody* was performed at the London Musical Festival, and conducted by himself. This *jeu d'esprit*, in the nature of a relaxation, did not meet with great favour from the critics, who seemed to think that if a composer chose to do anything so perverse in itself as to found his piece on old English melodies, he should at least transform them into something peculiarly his own. But this was not the bent of Percy Pitt's temperament, with its dramatic sympathies : the old English melodies were for him the reason of the composition, and although his own connecting or enclosing medium was modern, he would have thought he had failed had it transformed instead of setting off the originals. Perhaps, after all this English opera, he had England on the brain. The piece 'coruscated with brilliance,' one critic wrote ; another called it 'a brilliantly clear disquisition on popular texts.' Still, they added, why do it ? The public, however, enjoyed it very much indeed, and found it 'robust and jolly.'

But still, opera remained Percy Pitt's chief care, and his work at Covent Garden an engrossing occupation. Whatever his dissatisfactions, he was incapable of neglecting his job ; nor indeed, whatever his disappointments, was he either so peevish as to cry over spilt milk, or so passionate as to call for pistols and poison. He was sorry about English opera, and

indeed still working for it in his quiet way, but he could still enjoy conducting the foreign article, not to speak of lunching at Pagani's, or burrowing about in musical history. He had had the pleasure in 1909 of conducting the first operatic performance in England of Saint-Saëns *Samson et Dalila*. It had been given once, years before ; but as the censor had objected to the representation of Biblical personages on the stage, it had been presented as an oratorio, and the result had been anything but happy. The same fate had attended Debussy's *L'Enfant Prodigue* ; it had been given at the Sheffield Musical Festival of 1908 as a cantata, and its first performance on any stage was conducted by Percy Pitt during Beecham's spring season at Covent Garden in 1910. Beecham continued to be considerably more interesting than the Syndicate, and Percy Pitt also conducted for him, in the winter of that year, the first performance in England of Leroux's *Le Chemineau*, and a *Fidelio* revival.

It was rather vexatious, in the summer of 1910, to have the Syndicate callously giving Wagner in German, with foreign artists. One of them was Madame Litvinne, a Russian artist, who provided behind the scenes that surprising spectacle, a singer going off in a huff with Percy Pitt. According to her account, in her autobiography, 'Mr. P.' of Covent Garden accused her of not knowing the part of Isolde, because she made a slight grammatical mistake, singing a *der* for a *die*. Apparently the days when such a criticism was perilous were not as long gone as Percy Pitt thought. 'My good breeding,' wrote the infuriated lady, 'prevented my hurling myself upon

him like a lioness, biting and rending.' But supposing she had been just a shade less carefully educated——! 'I simply answered, "Fling wide the doors! Never again shall I set foot in Covent Garden. As for you, you are unworthy of being the manager for an artist like me!" And I swept past P., haughty as a tragedy queen.' But this account appeared in 1934, when the only other survivor of the scene was Mr. Hermann Grünebaum, who, however, preserved a different recollection of it. It was in the foyer. Madame Litvinne had been engaged to sing Isolde in a performance without cuts. She was used to the shortened version, and though Grünebaum had taken her through the complete one not unsuccessfully,

she turned to Neil Forsyth and Percy Pitt and said that after all she would prefer to make the cuts as usual. Upon this, Forsyth told her that the tickets had been sold specifying uncut performances. A discussion ensued, and Mme Litvinne declared, 'So great an artist as I cannot take risks in these things.' Something in her way of saying, 'I, the great artist,' ruffled Percy Pitt, but I think it was Forsyth who said, 'Well, then, you had better leave it,' and then, addressing me, 'Please see Mme Litvinne into a taxi.' Poor lady, the tears flowed down her cheeks. I felt sorry for her, and did not think she was justly treated.

She did not literally keep her vow as regarded Covent Garden, for she sang Isolde there that winter, but it was for Beecham, not for the Syndicate.

The incident hardly amounted to an exception to Percy Pitt's often-noted success with the temperamental. According to the lady's account, it was she who flew off. According to Grünebaum's, it was

Forsyth who dismissed her : too impatiently, perhaps, although it hardly seems that their differences could have been compromised.

In May, 1911, Percy Pitt assisted at a touching occasion—the Santley Benefit. A matinée was given at Covent Garden as a tribute to Sir Charles Santley, then seventy-seven. Pitt conducted the first act of *Samson et Dalila*, Tree appeared in Parker's adaptation of Fauchois' *Beethoven* ; Genée and Maud Allan danced ; Maggie Teyte, Ben Davies, Ruby Helder and Harry Lauder sang. Finally, Sir Charles himself made his last appearance in his own old part of Tom Tug in Dibdin's *Waterman*, in which he had first made a hit at least fifty years before.

The operatic item had been put first in the programme to allow Percy Pitt to hurry off to Queen's Hall. He had never been busier ; for Covent Garden was already preparing for the Coronation Gala. The house had been closed for three days in the previous summer, when King Edward died, and again on the day of his funeral ; it was now making ready a scene of unparalleled magnificence for the performance which King George had commanded. It took place on June 26. The audience consisted chiefly of the King's guests, and the few seats available for the public fetched enormous prices ; a month before the event, £1,000 failed to secure a box, while single seats realized as much as £100.

The show was really worth seeing—the show in the auditorium as well as on the stage. The King wore admiral's uniform with the Garter : the Queen pale pink satin with the Garter, a stomacher of diamonds which included the twin Stars of Africa, a diamond

collar and rivière and a diamond crown. On the King's right was the German Crown Princess, also in diamonds, and on the Queen's left the German Crown Prince ; and then there was the Crown Prince of Greece. The stalls and boxes were practically filled with notables of the native and foreign diplomatic services, armies and navies, blazing with colour and decorations : their ladies, in all *their* diamonds : and Indian princes flaming with jewels. There were also some Americans who had discovered at the last minute that levée dress was *de rigueur* ; but their costumes, though not made to measure, passed well enough once they were in their seats. All these blazing beings were sitting among masses of roses. Pink and damask roses wreathed the fronts of the balconies and boxes. Small pink climbing roses ran up from the floor to the balcony, and foamed over it, except where over the Royal Box festoons of La France roses fell from golden cornucopias. Baskets of pink and damask roses hung from the centres of the first tier boxes. The Royal Box, which was composed of the eleven middle boxes of the grand tier, was outlined by festoons of crimson plush with immense bullion fringes, and politely lined with pink carnations, the Queen's favourite flower ; while over the crimson plush fell decorations of orchids—mauve, heliotrope, citron, cream and white. So far well, although scarlet uniforms and coloured dresses came off doubtfully in the contest with deep pink roses. It was thought, however, that the note struck by the names of the units of the Empire, which were written round the grand tier in brilliant yellow roses, was slightly discordant.

In such a scene—the origin political, the function display, and the atmosphere worldly—it was impossible that the music should not take a secondary place ; but its selection and arrangement was so very clever, that it can hardly have been anything but an instance of Percy Pitt's dramatic talent. Hardly had the strains of *God Save the King* ceased to sound, when the curtain rose on a scene breathing the same spirit of worldly splendour, and harmonizing with the excitement of people newly arrived at a state function in all their best clothes—the scene of Radames' triumphant return, in *Aïda*, sung by Destinn, Kirkby Lunn, Bassi and Gilly. Nerves thus subtly pleased and soothed were ready for the softer passion of the balcony scene from *Roméo et Juliette*—Franz and Melba. The Royal party then retired to the foyer, and supped at tables adorned with the gold plate from Buckingham Palace. They returned, doubtless in cheerful mood, to the delightful comedy of the lesson scene from *Il Barbiere*, performed by Tetrizzini, Sammarco, McCormack, Marcoux, and Malatesta ; to the brilliant lightness of the solo polacca from *Mignon* sung by Tetrizzini ; and to the final midnight sorceries of Russian ballet, *Le Pavillon d'Armide*. The guests no doubt told their Majesties that they had enjoyed the evening ; and one would not be surprised if it was true.

There is something almost uncanny about the skill of this adaptation to the needs of the moment.

Aïda was conducted by Campanini, *Roméo* by Percy Pitt, *Il Barbiere* by Panizza, and the ballet by Tchernin, its composer. The absence of the work of any British composer from the programme was commented on in the press ; but, as one of the papers observed

with treacherous blandness, the presence of British works was not to be expected, since they were not usually performed at Covent Garden. It was something to be thankful for, surely, the critics added, that some of the artists were English, and actually one of the conductors. That not only the gala performance, but the entire season, was dedicated to French and Italian opera, annoyed the *Frankfurter Zeitung* also, which complained that German opera was being boycotted. It was perhaps unfortunate, considering the international atmosphere, that no German work was included ; but the Syndicate was able to reply truthfully that it had already designed a German season for the autumn—a Wagner season—and in fact, as Percy Pitt joyfully wrote to his fellow-conspirator, Wagner in English.

He had been right not to despair ; like the sun, which persuaded the obstinate traveller to drop his cloak, his quiet persistence had melted the Syndicate. The Doctor was galvanized.

What you told me yesterday has powerfully stimulated my imagination ; I have recovered my health and strength at a stroke, because I have been inspired with the hope of useful activity and faithful effort . . . And so my, *our* heart's desire, the *permanent* establishment of opera in English, may yet be realized. The third time we *must* succeed. And it would be in keeping with all my life's experience hitherto. Twice the negotiations with Wagner came to nothing ; but the third time I reached him. After two postponements I came to Manchester. I could adduce much more, for *never* have I succeeded the first time, but success always comes later. My dearest wish would be fulfilled, if it were so again : *success at last !*

Alas ! the good Doctor was not as young as he had been in those days, when success could be waited for. He had lately had to give up going to his dear Weibegg, because the hills were now too much for his legs ; he was on a diet ; his holidays were spent at cures. And he was seventy-four. He went to Bayreuth in great spirits, and conducted there during the summer, but found, as was only too natural, that he could not attempt the autumn season in England. If only he rested till the spring, he said, he should be ‘ quite strong again.’ It was a terrible blow, and Pitt could not refrain from urging him a little : did his advisers realize how much depended on it ? Richter returned rather warmly that his ‘ advisers ’ were doctors ; ‘ I have no other advisers, and would not listen to them. Or can you think, that I can so easily forego several hundred pounds ? ’ The autumn season at Covent Garden was devoted to Wagner and a little Humperdinck, but in German conducted by Schalk.

I must tell you now [the Doctor wrote] that if the Syndicate wants me in the spring, I will only come if artistic matters are to be discussed and decided, as heretofore, only between you, Higgins, and myself. I can still work—that I proved to satisfaction at Bayreuth—but I must no longer vex myself with annoyances outside the artistic sphere, otherwise it is all up with my recovered health ; and I *must* avoid that. . . . I am still feasting on the memory of Bayreuth. *We* too could have had *that* in English in London—if not quite so perfect, yet as good as anywhere—if there were no spiteful or stupid folk in the world.

But the spring came and still no Doctor. He had refused offers from Petersburg, Moscow, Brussels,

Antwerp, Vienna, Budapest, and Madrid ; but he could not refuse Bayreuth. He was doing a cure in hopes of being well enough for the Bayreuth gala performances of 1912 ; but in 1913 there would be none, and why should they not, he wrote, have a great Wagner festival in London, ' which would at the same time be my farewell to England, and to public life altogether.' But after the gala performances, he burnt his baton. The doctors permitted no further exertion.

With Hans Richter disappeared all hope of English opera from the Syndicate.

CHAPTER X

Composing and Conducting

With Richter gone, and the final failure of 'our plans,' a certain flatness fell upon Covent Garden for Percy Pitt. There was a good deal going on, there were some new interesting productions ; but the sense of working up towards a high point was lacking. They could go on producing stock opera ; but it was Beecham who went in for most of the new sensations—Beecham even who in 1913 produced the *Meistersinger* in English. The summer season of 1912 was chiefly devoted to established favourites, though it included the first performances of Wolf-Ferrari's *Gioielli della Madonna* and of Zandonai's *Conchita*. This was Covent Garden's reply to the new rivalry of Oscar Hammerstein at the London Opera House. But London could not support two grand opera companies. Covent Garden lost £15,000 over the season ; but Hammerstein said that he lost £40,000. There was one other remarkable circumstance about the season, and one which must have given Percy Pitt some satisfaction : it was the first since 1863 in which *Faust* had not been performed.

It was Beecham who first produced Strauss's *Rosenkavalier* in the following spring ; it was Raymond Rôze who ran an English season at Covent Garden in the winter after.

These things were depressing ; but there was nothing for it but to carry on, to do the thing that came to hand—and any kindness that was possible. In 1912, when the Liverpool Corporation had announced a competition for the post of City Organist, Pitt with Cowen, German, and Wood wrote to call its attention to Edwin Lemare. This brilliant musician and composer, who had formerly been organist at St. Margaret's, Westminster, was being lost to England through engagements in the United States. He was not a man who could be asked to compete for the post, the signatories wrote ; but if Liverpool understood her interest she would invite him to accept it. For once a kindness was not received with indifference ; Lemare wrote of ' this lovely act ' with an emotion which showed how keenly he felt his friends' goodwill, although he did not become organist at Liverpool.

Opportunities for Percy Pitt to make himself useful as an adjudicator were of frequent occurrence ; his knowledge and experience and sober judgment, not to mention his friendly willingness, made him one of the first to be thought of in such a connection. Among institutions where he was himself almost an institution in a judicial capacity was the Guildhall School of Music, presided over since 1910 by Landon Ronald. Their friendship and mutual admiration dated from Queen's Hall days. Pitt always helped in adjudicating the big scholarships at the School, and proved himself, his friend wrote, ' one of the most trustworthy and dependable examiners with whom I have ever collaborated.'

In January, 1913, the Philharmonic Society was in

a difficulty. An unexpected vacancy had occurred in their programme for February 8, through the last-minute withdrawal of Granville Bantock's new work *Fine at the Fair*; and Percy Pitt stepped into the breach, conducting his *Symphony in G minor*. The Society thanked him warmly for his public spirit; and later in the year appealed to it again. Their concert on December 5 was in several ways a unique occasion. It was the last of their Centenary year, and the first since the Society had received the title of 'Royal'; it was also the first time of Tetrazzini's appearing at Queen's Hall. Sir Hubert Parry was to conduct his own *New Symphony*, and other things, and Percy Pitt to accompany Tetrazzini in singing his own song written for her, *Sérénade du Passant*, besides sharing the conducting. The song was a great success, and not only on account of the singer; one listener at least regarded it as 'certainly the most enjoyable item of a lengthy programme'; and it was, as usual, thought 'delightfully orchestrated' and 'beautifully scored.' But it was not only the song which Percy Pitt had contributed to the success of the evening, but an ample measure of Percy Pitt-ness. The secretary, writing to convey the directors' thanks for the help of all kinds which he had given, added, 'They gladly acknowledge that it was owing to your efforts that the result of the concert was so satisfactory, thereby assuring the position of the Society for the present season,' and presented him with a silver cigarette-box suitably inscribed.

The proceedings of that pleasant evening had closed with a Centenary Supper at Pagani's, and the presentation by Parry to Tetrazzini of the Society's gold

medal—the Beethoven Gold Medal, as it was called. She gave Percy Pitt her signed menu card.

All this was very well, and Percy Pitt was the last man to neglect either friendly deeds or routine work because everything did not go to his satisfaction ; but it might well be that at this time his thoughts turned more towards composition than they had done for some years past. Covent Garden with an idealistic policy had absorbed all his energies. Covent Garden playing for safety left whatever originality and enthusiasm was in him to employ itself elsewhere.

That he had of late years produced so little work of his own was noticed with regret, whenever the performance of one of his works brought him for a moment to the notice of critics. ‘ Mr. Pitt is a gifted composer, one who would in all probability take high rank among his contemporaries if his many duties in connection with our national opera-house left him more time for composition.’ His friends also at times lamented that he was not more in the public eye with works of his own.

I’m very glad P. P. is so fully occupied [one of them wrote rather later]. He’s an astonishingly able fellow—but he lacks the particular kind of British grit which brings men forward. Had I been he with all his gifts I would years ago have gone to America. His gifts are so truly cosmopolitan that in a narrow-minded, chauvinistic—or parish-pump-land like this (I refer to the arts of course) he gets lost at once. *Yet in his way, there is none other quite like him in Europe.*

These observations, being made by a friend, required a little discounting. It was not want of British grit which kept Percy Pitt from pushing himself, and

made him so successful in dealing with the difficulties of a thankless job ; while if he had gone to America in search of advertisement, it would no longer have been true that there was no one quite like him. The idea that he had been side-tracked into a line in which his gifts were wasted was a mistake. It is true that, like all composers, he was a poor man ; and it is true that, like most composers, he had to get another job in order to keep himself and others alive. But the job he did take was one for which one side of his character was so exactly suited, one which he so much delighted in, and one which served so well his life's aim, that it is doubtful whether he would have given it up if he could.

If the side of him which made music was baulked of its full activity, and sometimes felt the chain, the side of him which interpreted and gave music was fully occupied. As a composer he would have enjoyed more of the limelight ; but he did not care particularly for limelight. No sane man is so inhuman as not to like appreciation ; but for Percy Pitt and all true men the thing done, and not the fame earned, was what lay nearest the heart. He could not have been a supremely great composer—or he would have ; power such as that implies is not dammed by comparatively trifling obstacles. The world was the poorer probably by some charming operas ; but then it is no use for anyone to write charming operas if they are not performed ; and to see that other people's charming operas were performed, and performed well, so that their beauty reached and touched the listener, and becoming part of his mind reacted on other and yet other minds for ever—this was also a work worth

doing. That he could do it very well—that he could not only interpret music, but could deal with human material, and quietly carry things in the way he wished them to go, like some still-flowing stream—this implied gifts so specialized that he could not help liking to use them. Every faculty rejoices to be used ; indeed, almost the whole pleasure of life consists in using one's special faculties. It was impossible that Percy Pitt should not enjoy conducting, and the sense of understanding and conveying the music of great masters ; that he should not enjoy directing, and the sense of creating unity out of diversity ; that he should not enjoy twisting furious artists round his finger, and the sense of power and amusement which comes of all successful dealing with humankind.

This work in the wings indicated some want of personal ambition : which his friends regretted. And certainly personal ambition can work wonders ; but perhaps it is as well that all gifted people are not consumed by a desire for the spectacular. That lesser parts should be well filled, and not left to fools, is a very good thing for the whole production. 'To appear as principal actor among inferior players'—a dictionary definition of 'to star'—was to Percy Pitt 'a hideous thought.' His self-love could be satisfied at less cost ; and indeed, like most people of that disposition, he found a tolerable degree of satisfaction in the daily round. The serenity of his face and manner implied, perhaps, not so complete a contentment as most people chose to think ; it implied more suffering, more self-conquest, a philosophy more tried in the fire ; but it did imply also a willingness to be happy, a pleasure in the amenities of life, the natural

easiness of temper which goes with a sound digestion. Musical surroundings, pleasant contacts, a good dinner were not the whole duty and delight of man for Percy Pitt ; but he could enjoy a life so constituted, and he made those who had to do with him enjoy it too.

‘Hullo, sir, and what’s your good news?’ was his heartening greeting. The ‘courteous manner’ of which all felt the influence, the ‘air of friendship for all and sundry which completely masks his real feelings,’ witnessed not only to his ‘diplomatic talent,’ but to the self-effacement which is the secret of such influence. One cannot have a ‘temperament’ of one’s own, one cannot go wild and long-haired and shoot up like a rocket, if one wishes to control the temperamental. ‘He had none of the airs of a musician. He was much more likely to be taken for a popular family physician, or a man of business.’ Patients sometimes need deceiving for their own good. ‘Mr. Pitt is too clever to lie,’ wrote a singer, ‘but people he meets often think what he wants them to think, without relation to the actual verity.’ ‘Loving him as I do,’ she added, ‘I still wonder whether I can truthfully say that I know Percy Pitt.’ She did not ; no one did. But the secret soul under that calm exterior had neither treachery nor malice among its mysteries ; that much was plain—somehow, one could not say how. ‘Is it the way he has of not seeing you, talking hard to you, at you, with you, until with a disconcerting suddenness you find yourself confronted with a pair of the brownest and most steadfast eyes in the world?’

Yes, it was that. A long course of kindness was some evidence. All ranks at Covent Garden had

experienced that ; and had taken him to their bosoms. ' No one ever called Percy Pitt " Mr." He was known to the great ones of the musical world as " Percy," and to the musical world at large as " the Maestro." ' No one was ever alarmed at receiving a letter in his handwriting, unless, his signature being completely illegible, they thought it was from some mysterious stranger. But deeds are not the best evidence as to character ; a fact unfortunate for those novels in which awful villains are adored for years before the murder as charming creatures. Their friends must have been blind. The eyes, the voice, the movement of the hands, the turn of the head, are witnesses which cannot be silenced ; and these said that Percy Pitt was kind, and honest—and unknown.

His works said much the same. Light music was what he oftenest chose to give to the world. Now and then there came an unexpected hint of gloom and passion. But most of it was gay and friendly, strong with the light strength of a ballet dancer, and learned like those virtuosi, the birds. He had never yet written that opera. But in 1904 he had told Elgar that though the opera hung fire, ' I've got a charming Ballet Scenario with which I hope to do something.' What he did with it eventually was to turn it into a suite called *Sakura*, which was first performed in April, 1914, at the Torquay Musical Festival. The ballet had been Japanese, and the prelude expressed the dawn breaking over a Japanese village ; although during the rest of the suite the Oriental atmosphere was only lightly suggested, and the last movement was a waltz which gave general delight. The high musicianly qualities of the work were as usual recognized ;



A CARICATURE BY LOUIS WAIN
Percy Pitt and some well known colleagues

but its charm and lightness, its eminent danceableness, raised in the mind of one listener just that question which Percy Pitt's life itself suggested. Why must we all strain to be giants? Why should so many serious musicians disdain to write light music, which, easily reaching, might raise the taste of the public, instead of leaving such work to hacks, who could only corrupt it?

At a later performance when the *Sakura* suite was played, a song occurred in another part of the programme which beautifully pointed this question about art. Why should people, who were capable of writing poetry, disdain to write charming song-words, and leave the job to those who—like the Poet Laureate—thought the ordinary citizen was not entitled to it? The song was as follows:—

My little lamb has eyes of blue,
O lamb, where have you wandered to?
Your coat is straight, and your paws—(paws?)—are wet:
O little lamb, did you forget?

The night is starry, my love is cold,
And my little lamb is getting old.
Kiss me good-bye, and hold my hand,
For the lamb and I are alone in the land.

To whom this entreaty was addressed, considering that there was no one in the land except the singer and an old blind sheep, was one of the many horrid mysteries of the composition. This dreadful result arose from the same cause which nearly led Mr. Gibbs of Drury Lane to miss such a capital opportunity—namely, the excessive ambition of serious artists.

The words of Percy Pitt's songs were frequently taken from French poetry, which was another of his

pleasures. Many of his contemporaries had studied music abroad ; but they seemed to have forgotten their ' languages ' as soon as they got home. Percy Pitt's cosmopolitanism was another reason for that sort of aloofness which lay behind his general benevolence. Any Englishman who really reads much in a foreign language has large tracts in his mind where his friends do not walk. They sometimes applied to him, however, for information about it. When a French translation was made of the *Dream of Gerontius*, neither Elgar nor his adviser, Jaeger of Novello's, was satisfied ; but the translator had a considerable standing, and it was felt that the task of criticism required an expert.

MY DEAR EE [wrote Jaeger], I heard last night that Percy Pitt is staying at Plas Gwyn. So I thought that was a splendid opportunity of your asking his view of the d'Offoël translation of *Gerontius*. It seems to me that only a person either a literary Frenchman or a foreigner who like P. P. knows French intimately and is steeped in *French poetry* and at the same time appreciates the difficulties of a fellow translating *for music*, can sit in judgment on a man who, like d'Offoël, is thought good enough, in *Paris*, to prepare a new translation of a masterpiece like *Tristan*, which translation has been officially adopted by the Grand Opera (so I understand) for the performance in the New Year, in place of Wilder's (or whatever the other Johnny's name is).

On other occasions also Percy Pitt helped Elgar in similar doubts. ' Really the declamation of the line should be " *Quand nos bourgeois se rouvriront.*" '— ' Perhaps better to run i and o into one.' It was another agreeable feature of his work for Covent

Garden, that he went abroad every year and steeped himself afresh in Continental thought and speech, staying with foreign friends and hearing foreign plays and operas.

His sympathy with all the various moods of opera was based upon an ever-increasing and now enormous knowledge. An 'almost superhuman memory' for music astonished all who had occasion to test it. 'His mind retained practically the whole history of music as we know it to-day, and he could answer almost any question on this vast subject without the use of reference books.' Books were there if they were wanted. He gradually collected a whole musical library, largely composed of operatic scores, annotated by himself, which was often drawn upon by institutions in search of something abstruse. Modern music of importance was constantly being added to it. 'I was glad to hear your *Variations* again,' he wrote to Elgar. 'I am very hungry for that Full Score Novello is bringing out and am saving a place on my shelves next to Richard Strauss.' His knowledge was able sometimes to protect his friends from a pin-prick.

The theme in question appears in *Parsifal*, Act III—given to trombones if my memory be right. With your March, it is only the 2nd appearance (brass) which strikes me so much, the earlier one (cor angl. etc.) does not stand out enough to 'worrit.' It seems to me that one should not give the 'shrieking brotherhood' of critics a chance to throw mud and go reminiscence-hunting, and if you let the passage stand, you may be certain that some gentleman will be only too pleased.

'A born connoisseur,' he delighted in these wander-

ings among the unheard melodies of his printed scores, in these visits to the well-stored pigeon-holes of musical memory, in the sorting and arranging and cataloguing of his treasures ; and as he moved house fairly often, the joy of rearrangement was a recurrent one.

Such a man need not be pitied for spending himself upon giving opera to the world. They were not too bad, those days—before the War.

In the summer of 1914 everything was going along nicely in the musical world. Some of Percy Pitt's work was being performed in Cape Town. Mackenzie of the R.A.M. had written an opera, *The Cricket*, and was corresponding with him about producing it. The Syndicate, in a burst of energy, had produced *Parsifal*, which until three years previously had been the monopoly of Bayreuth, and was still a novelty to the outside world. Clemens Franckenstein was writing from Munich about its forthcoming production there. The desecration of this holy of holies, involved in its being performable by anybody and everybody, had nearly given Hans Richter a fit ; but he had now ' given up thinking about it.' To Pitt his ' old comrade-in-arms Hans ' wrote that he had been dreaming about conducting his English orchestra in *Tristan*.

I have written myself into a fine state of emotion. But it is true too : however splendidly the *Meister-singer*, the *Ring*—in short everything was played, *Tristan* remains for me the crown of all achievements ; I have nowhere heard it so perfect and exemplary, not even in Vienna. And *such* joy in the rehearsals, as the work improved every time, and with it the comprehension and the enthusiasm of the orchestra. But now I must leave off and modestly retire to my pensioned corner.

His letters had become few, because he had so much time on his hands—a frequent paradox ; and so had Percy Pitt's to him, for the opposite reason. Though he occasionally sent a genial hint about not having heard anything of a postal strike in England, he admitted that ink might seem to be dear in Bayreuth too. ' Rack nothing, least of all your brains, over my long silence. I have nothing to do, but trifles and trivialities nevertheless hinder me from writing. *What* could estrange us, or even come between us? So : calm yourself. *We shall always be the same !* '

A pleasant world ! There had been one melancholy event to remind people of the transience of human security. On May 29, 1914, one of the fastest of the world's liners, the *Empress of Ireland*, was rammed and sunk at the mouth of the St. Lawrence by the Norwegian collier *Storstad*. In those days the sinking of a single ship, the loss of a thousand-odd lives, was considered quite a calamity. A memorial concert was held at the Albert Hall, at which Percy Pitt conducted Sullivan's *In Memoriam*.

These lives were lost by accident. Within a few months, almost all the great nations of the world were glowing with the sacred intention of taking as many lives as possible.

During the Napoleonic wars, as Aldous Huxley has reminded us, friendly communication between the belligerent countries, on matters unconnected with the operations, was not interrupted. Sir Humphrey Davy travelled in France as though nothing were going on, and was kindly received by French scientists, who did not care two hoots what anyone was doing with guns and bayonets. The frightfully increased bitter-

ness which marked our modern war was partly perhaps the result of an increased democratic participation in the governments' proceedings, but more of a greatly increased fear, born of long bickering and suspense and of the improvements in armaments which brought war to everyone's doorstep. Scientists were taking a considerable part in this. It was no longer agreeable to receive an eminent chemist, who might be fresh from experiments with poison gas or high explosive ; nor indeed was it very pleasant for eminent chemists to cross the seas just then.

Musicians were not a very dangerous class. But the sword fell across the harp-string too. Did anything ever change Richter, who had been so sure that nothing could estrange him from his English friend ? Percy Pitt had had no more letters from him, when the Doctor died in 1916. For such a man as Hans Richter, to whom England had been a second fatherland—for such a man as Percy Pitt, with his long association with the Continent and his delight in the unboundaried realms of art, there could at least have been no such blind enthusiasm of hatred as made the War at first almost a joyful crusade. It may be supposed that theirs was that more heavy-hearted patriotism, which felt that since the thing had come there was no choice left. They could always tell themselves, besides, that their quarrel was not with the German or the English people but with the Kaiser or King George, or the Government, or the military caste, or Sir Edward Grey, or the Pan-Germans. The German invasion of Belgium was of great assistance in reconciling many Englishmen of the type, to which Percy Pitt belonged, with patriotic necessity.

He was forty-four, and therefore of military age ; but when he tried to join up he was rejected as unfit. Nothing remained but to carry on with a job which had lost overnight most of its interest, activity, and profit, and to help with the various musical performances got up to raise funds for purposes connected with the War.

Albert Coates wrote from Petrograd, where he was getting up concerts for war charities. Vaughan-Williams could not come to see about the production of his work because he was a hospital orderly. Busoni went to America on a concert tour, and then settled at Zurich, refusing to play in any of the belligerent countries. Two musicians as eminent as Busoni, who were, if not quite such old friends, still friendly acquaintances of Percy Pitt's, were more directly involved in the changed conditions of the time. Chaliapin, though his usual course of life was not immediately disturbed, eventually found himself, a monarchist, contributing to the entertainment of Soviet Russia. Paderewski became as famous a statesman and patriot as he had been a pianist. In England it seemed at first as if opera had ceased ' for the duration ' ; for the summer season of 1914 was the last the Syndicate gave, before Covent Garden was commandeered by Government for the storage of furniture from the hotels which had been taken over as government offices. But after the first shock it was understood that all pre-War activities were to go on, as far as possible : not only by way of keeping up the national spirits, but in order to prevent the enormous unemployment which would have resulted from a stoppage. They were bad enough times, even as it

was, for artists of all sorts ; for with the best will in the world to continue, many enterprises had had to come to a sudden end.

Some of these harmless people had also been caught abroad, and interned. A piteous appeal was addressed by musicians in Ruhleben, in June, 1915, to thirty-three prominent English people, politicians, bishops, great ladies, a few business men and writers, but chiefly musicians, among whom was Percy Pitt.

The musician [the prisoners' spokesman claimed], owing to his highly nervous organization and temperament, suffers more than other men. His development is arrested, his power atrophied, owing to the perpetual strain and the lack of those conditions and opportunities which are essential to good artistic work. For several months, no opportunity could be secured for work of this kind, and even after this lapse of time the only opportunity for professional work available for us is limited to three hours' use of a piano weekly, and even that is confined to a very restricted number. . . . Our artistic powers and faculties must necessarily deteriorate and may be permanently ruined. What applies to us is equally true of those German professional musicians who are interned in England. We therefore earnestly plead that before winter, before cold and wet weather sets in, an exchange of professional musicians between England and Germany should take place.

A list was appended of those interned : nine composers, eight singers, six pianists, four violinists, two 'cellists, two organists, two conductors, and a flautist : while eight young men hoped for the benefit of the arrangement as 'students.'

Whether Percy Pitt privately thought the we-feel-it-more plea a good one may be doubted. What is

the use of being finer than other people, and basing your life more on unworldly beauty, if it is not to raise you above worldly misfortunes, instead of sinking you deeper beneath them than others? Still, the Camp Commandant had let the letter through; and if the Germans would exchange anybody, so much the better. He wrote to his friend Sir Alexander Mackenzie, another of those appealed to, as a personage of more standing than himself; and Mackenzie agreed to forward the appeal to the Foreign Office. Sir Edward Grey's answer, however, was that the Government, 'while appreciating the reasons urged on behalf of this proposal, considers that it would not be possible to select one class of interned civilians for special treatment, when others, such as invalids, have a prior claim to release.'—'That being so,' Mackenzie added, 'there is nothing more to be done except find some way to let those poor devils know it: and in such a manner as not to discourage them too much'; which he thought might be done through their spokesman's mother.

Nothing could be done for them. At home help was organized for those of their fellows who were suffering nearly as much. Isidore de Lara got up emergency concerts in aid of musicians and actors who had been hit by the War; for his May, 1915, one, he expressed a wish to have something new of Percy Pitt's, and a *Suite de Ballet*, or second Sakura Suite was performed at Queen's Hall. It was so far warlike as to have for its first movement a '*danse guerrière*'; but that had perhaps been rechristened. The other brief numbers were a waltz, *pas de fascination*, pantomime, and finale, which, so far from show-

ing the influence of this terrible time, were thought to display the composer in 'one of his happiest moments,' and had no doubt been written before the War was thought of. The suite, one critic wrote, was 'not concert music ; it should be danced to or heard under trees in the open,' and it charmed an audience willing to forget for a quarter of an hour.

He gave his assistance at times to such musical societies as still carried on : conducting his own *Ballet Egyptien* for the Sunday Concert Society, and helping the Philharmonic in a difficulty, when he formed and trained an orchestra to perform Debussy's Third Nocturne, at very short notice. He helped in more ways than one with the Lady Mayoress's Concert at the Albert Hall in aid of the Belgian Relief Fund in February, 1915. From abroad, the same year, came the news that 'English music will be heard this season at the Monte Carlo concerts. The first work to be given will be Mr. Percy Pitt's *Suite pour Petit Orchestre*, which is now being rehearsed by M. Jehin.' The opera class at the Royal Academy of Music had ceased to exist ; but Percy Pitt was one of the judges for the Liszt scholarship given there in 1915, and also in a competition for composers. But, luckier than most men whose job died on them in those days, he had regular work as well as these stray activities ; for though Covent Garden had gone down, the flag of opera was still flying.

Beecham had given an opera season at Drury Lane in the summer of 1914 ; but the rest of that year had been a blank for him as for the Syndicate. In 1915, however, he formed the Thomas Beecham Opera Company. Hitherto he had financed his operatic

ventures himself ; but the sudden death of his father, instead of improving his financial position, had for the moment at least unsettled it. He was still set on supporting opera, and the limited liability company was formed to relieve him of the sole financial responsibility, while the artistic responsibility was gladly left in his hands. It was a good work to keep any form of music alive at such a time, not to mention singers and orchestra ; and it was not too much to speak of ‘ the debt of gratitude that England owes to him for his courage in maintaining a regular series of operatic performances during the War, even under the most difficult circumstances.’ Percy Pitt was one of those who joined him ; and found the enterprise a blessing, not only as giving him occupation during a period when idleness would have been specially melancholy, but as providing interesting opportunities which had been too few in the programmes of the poor dear Syndicate.

Beecham’s policy was as bold as ever. The War might be on ; but he gave Wagner. Opera in English was said never to pay ; but he gave all the operas in English. Native English works were a drug in the market ; but he gave native English works, such as Stanford’s *Critic* and Smyth’s *Boatswain’s Mate*. Shortly before the War, he had been the promoter of a Russian season, at which Chaliapin made his first English appearance, and such Russian thrills as Moussorgsky’s *Boris Godounov* and *Kovantchina*, Stravinsky’s *Rossignol*, and Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Ivan the Terrible* and *Coq d’Or*. As soon as his War company felt its feet, he set to work to reproduce these, some of them difficult enough. Percy Pitt was given the direction

of *Kovantchina* and of *Coq d'Or* ; and while he found the first fairly plain sailing, ' Rimsky-Korsakov's opera was a far more difficult nut to crack, not so much from a musical point of view perhaps as on account of its whimsical and irresponsible character.' Nor were the former performances of much assistance.

The Diaghilev production had been almost entirely entrusted to dancers who mimed the action whilst principals and chorus dealt with the musical side, whereas in the English version it was of course decided to put the work on the stage in accordance with its original form. To make things more difficult too, the production had been entrusted to a very distinguished star of the Russian ballet who, splendid as she was in preparing and rehearsing the dances and processions, made very slight and ineffective progress with principals and chorus, with the result that the full dress rehearsal found the opera in a half-baked state of preparation, and entirely lacking in any sort of dramatic cohesion.

Percy Pitt could see what was wanted, but the music was his business, and the rehearsal left him tearing his hair. However, ' after the much-needed restoration brought about by means of a very satisfying lunch,' he and Donald Baylis, Beecham's lieutenant, persuaded Thomas Beecham to take over the stage-management himself in one furious last-minute effort. On the very day of the performance,

at 10.30 in the morning, a start was made with the whole company accompanied by the piano, and we worked steadily until lunch time, making a short half-hour break for the purpose of a light meal. Work was resumed at 2.30 and continued until 6, making a day of seven hours' rehearsal as a prepara-

tion for the performance which was to begin two hours later.

But the thing was pulled out of the fire, and the production was one of the best of the season.

And while that crisis lasted, who had had any time to think about the War? and while the fate of a performance hung in the balance, who cared whether or not a line was breaking out in France? Happy those, who were artists in such a time, and could not, if they would, forget the things that mattered! Perhaps those about them, perhaps they themselves between whiles, thought that they had lost the sense of proportion, and that Big Bertha mattered more than *Cog d'Or*. They were wrong. It was the world that had lost its sense of proportion, in fancying that there was anything on earth worth losing its soul for. Percy Pitt and his colleagues came home, perhaps, after that successful performance, and, thinking of those distant screams which, if they had been near, would have drowned their music, were ashamed that in harmony's name they had forgotten the War. What could have damned that honourable institution more completely, than that men, in its honour, should be ashamed of the angels?

CHAPTER XI

The British National Opera Company

The peace came, and with it that burst of rejoicing optimism which is now so strange to look back upon. It was natural to human hearts, after all that had passed, to feel that once the War was ended all would be well ; but it was not very creditable to human heads, to suppose that nobody was going to be the worse—apart from the dead and their relations—for all that material and spiritual damage. ‘Come, Polly,’ says the affectionate husband in *Punch’s* picture, ‘if I am a little irritable, it’s over in a minute !!’ He speaks, however, from amid the ruins of the drawing-room furniture.

Such complacency was short-sighted even in those fairly numerous people who had, for the moment, profited immensely by the abnormal trading conditions or the exceptional opportunities of the War. They might have foreseen that the countries of the world would for long be fit for none but heroes to live in. In the case of the fine arts the temporary flare-up of optimism and prosperity was not nearly so marked as in commercial circles. Very few artists had made anything out of the War ; very many had been ruined ; and the tastes of the post-War world somehow did not set strongly towards the higher forms of art, although musical comedy and dance bands did very well.

Opera was some time getting into its stride again. The Syndicate was comatose ; Neil Forsyth had been drowned in 1915 while fishing in the Spey, and Covent Garden appeared to have lost with him what financial confidence it had ever had. The Beecham Opera Company sat in its high places : that is to say, it gave grand-season opera at Covent Garden. The House reopened in the summer of 1919, when Beecham gave a somewhat conservative international programme, less from choice, probably, than from some accidental difficulties of arrangement ; for he followed it in the autumn with a more exciting répertoire, in English, in which Percy Pitt again conducted *Kovantchina* and the *Golden Cockerel*, and *Parsifal* was given in English for the first time. There was another English season in the spring. This seemed to bear out the statement of a member of his company, that they could have carried on successfully with 'English opera,' and that the grand season of 1920, with its foreign opera and artists and Russian ballet, was their undoing. Signs were apparent that all was not well ; and when, on the last night of its engagement, the Russian Ballet refused to appear, it was plain that a crash was imminent. In September, 1920, the *London Gazette* announced that a receiving order in bankruptcy had been made against Sir Thomas Beecham, and at the same time the Beecham Opera Company went into voluntary liquidation.

Both had an excellent press. It was recognized that Sir Thomas Beecham and his company had deserved well of the nation, and they were condoled with for being insufficiently supported. It was

remarked that Beecham was only following in the footsteps of Handel, who went bankrupt twice while pursuing 'the crazy game of purveying opera to the London populace.' Populace was perhaps scarcely the word ; for prices at Covent Garden had never permitted of much 'popular' support, and perhaps this was the very reason for its failure to pay.

The company, at any rate, did not believe that the game was crazy. There were several members who, like Percy Pitt, had not only artistic enthusiasm but good business heads ; and these believed that the crash need not have occurred, if the ideal of opera in English had been steadily adhered to. After the catastrophe the company carried on for six successful weeks as a commonwealth, fulfilling its provincial engagements, and only left off because the liquidators withdrew the scenery. They believed that previous concerns had 'gone down on management, and not for lack of public support,' and that it was the 'error of judgment' in giving the expensive foreign seasons which had ruined the Beecham Company. It was 'smashed and broken on the old idea that nothing Native was quite good enough.' Its reception with 'English opera' in the provinces had been excellent, and a month's season had often been sold out before it opened. They determined to carry on.

Seven professional musicians, one of whom was Percy Pitt, put up enough money to get a new company started. It began with quite an outfit of ideals. Not only would it pin its faith to 'opera in English,' and indeed as much native opera as was available—although it could not fairly be expected, after conditions had so long been adverse,

that native opera would soon be in a position to equal the foreign—but its constitution would be democratic, its prices popular, and its aims both lofty and educational. Though obliged to ask for support to begin with, another of its ideals was to be thoroughly solvent. It was thought that separate companies for London and for the provinces might be advisable, and Arthur Lomas of Manchester, who had been Beecham's manager for the provincial seasons, was active in organizing provincial support. In the autumn of 1921 an inaugural meeting was held in London, followed by meetings in the chief provincial towns. Seven of the cities were asked to subscribe a specified sum apiece. Every member of the company had to be a shareholder. Eight directors were elected by ballot from amongst the company, four representing 'the stage,' and four, among whom was Percy Pitt, 'the orchestra.' To these were added three business men, Sir William McCormick, Sir Charles Sykes, and Mr. Brand Lane of Manchester.

The democratic organization of the directorate was regarded with doubt by some people, on the ground that it would not have the prestige and authority enjoyed by an autocracy. But this, the promoters said courageously, must be risked. 'We are sure to have some terrifying experiences, and those of you who have not seen an angry *prima donna* in a manager's office can have little idea of what lies before us.' But the *donne* laughed at this, for they were all old friends and Beechamites and in high hopes. 'There was going to be a great boom in British music,' said one of the speakers, 'and as soon as the trade wheels started to revolve again artistic and musical

affairs would play a larger part in the life of the nation.'

That this was all very much after Percy Pitt's heart goes without saying. He was artistic director to the new company. More than either of the operatic ventures he had so far served, it seemed likely to work in the direction he wished, in the direction of conducting music by many and accessible channels all over the country ; and it was good to be associated, in that time which looked so promising and was to be so dreary, with something new and alive. But as it happened, without then being fully aware of it, he was associating himself at almost the same moment with something even newer and more alive. It was his good fortune—and disposition—to be caught up in one of the genuine currents which were beginning to flow from out of the whirlpool of post-War chaos, and to lend a hand in transforming the world.

'Wireless' was an invention which had been employed for war purposes ; but, unlike some other inventions, was turned after the War to new and fruitful uses. The discovery of the three-electrode valve had not only improved wireless telegraphy, but had made wireless telephony a practical proposition.

Early in 1920 the Marconi Company had constructed a transmitter with a power at first of 15 kilowatts, to carry out a series of tests. It even transmitted some concerts, at one of which Melba sang ; though reception was then only possible for a few experts, either those working with the company, or a very small number, something over 700, who were serious students of the subject. These independent workers, who had constructed receiving sets at a time

when to do so required genuine technical knowledge, persuaded the Post Office into allowing a small station to be established at Writtle and to transmit for half an hour every week, in order to enable them to go on experimenting with reception. The station began work in February, 1921, and gave tiny concerts every Tuesday. In May, 1922, the Marconi Company obtained permission to open the London station known as 2LO, which it did rather sensationally with a running commentary on the Carpentier-Lewis prize-fight. During that year it gave some concerts, usually in aid of charities.

The reluctance of the Postmaster-General to give wireless its head was due to the state of things in America, where no government control had been exercised, and the ether was a pandemonium of concerts broadcast by hundreds of stations on very slightly differing wavelengths and bringing no revenue to the State. Almost half of them eventually had to be suppressed. But such as it was, the progress in America was creating something like a popular demand for broadcasting in England. In May, 1922, the P.M.G. began discussions with the six electrical firms interested. As he utterly refused to license more than two companies, the six eventually realized that it would be to their best interest to combine into one, and in the articles of association it was laid down that every other bona fide British wireless firm could join by taking a £1 share. On this appropriately broad basis the British Broadcasting Company was formed, and though not actually licensed until 1923, it made its official start on November 14, 1922, broadcasting election results.

It asked Percy Pitt to be its musical adviser.

He accepted with pleasure. Broadcasting so far had not looked at all like being a whole-time job for a musician. There was besides to be a musical director under him, who would wrestle with the horrid details of the programmes, and the artists, and so forth ; he himself was rather to be responsible for the broad lines, the musical policy and strategy. It seemed to be the sort of thing one could think out in one's bath—a very good place for thinking—and neither he nor the directors believed that there would be any difficulty in combining it with the musical advisership of the B.N.O.C.

He was in for a hectic two years.

The public interest in broadcasting was far beyond what anyone had expected. It forced the pace and the programmes ; it bombarded the sweating head-quarter staff with letters, calls, and questions ; it demanded this, it objected to that. It read countless books explaining how the thing was done and encouraging it to have a try itself. Those were the days of enthusiasts who constructed receiving sets with bits of glass and wire and tin-foil, dropping cat's-whiskers irrevocably on the floor, and searching by the hour for the sensitive spot on the crystal ; studying diagrams which looked like maps of the movements of someone lost in the snow, and thrilling to strange howls and screams, odd plum-impaired voices, and faint sounds which turned out to be made by railway trains. Who, that made a wireless set of that kind, can ever forget the astonishment and joy with which the first strains of music were heard whimpering in the head-'phones ? or the jealous impatience when it

was not his turn for the 'phones, and the pain of his ears when it was? Schoolboys all over the world were explaining to ignorant females all about wavelengths and circuits, and ignorant females, careless of these technical details, were deriving new support for all kinds of remote conclusions about such things as the immortality of the soul. Indeed, the general zeal had a curious consequence for the new Company. It derived its revenue from the sale of licences to use an approved type of receiving set, and from royalties paid by the manufacturers of such sets. But the zealous amateurs, instead of buying expensive approved sets, made their own out of odds and ends or separate parts and applied for an 'experimenter's' licence; and when this was more or less stopped, they were in the position of being actually unable to get any licence at all, and being easily able to carry on without one: a matter which was eventually put right by the standard licence for all sets.

Its friends, however, were not the only class from whom the Company had to be saved. On the opposite tack were those who had an inborn aversion to anything new, from an obscure but correct sense that change is always in the end subversive, and were at pains to rationalize their objections by saying that wireless would interfere with the weather, or would use up the supply of electricity in the ether and precipitate the end of the world, or would devastate the privacy of the home with horrible noises and undesirable vulgarities.

There was undoubtedly a danger that something of the last kind might happen. From broadcast advertisements the public was saved by the Post-

master-General ; from inroads on its morals it was saved by the Censor ; but there was plenty of room within these limits for errors about its taste.

We sometimes grumble [wrote the *Musical Standard* later] at the B.B.C.'s artistic shortcomings, but when we remember how awful things might have been if the public had been played down to, given what it thought it wanted, we ought to praise God night and day that such a man as Percy Pitt was put at the helm at the beginning of the voyage.

It was not every musician who was prepared to help.

Few people realize [wrote Captain Eckersley] how broadcasting, when it began, was despised and counted not only puerile but also against the best interests of music. It showed great initiative on the part of those who, like Percy Pitt, defied prejudice and threw in their lot with a new and untried venture.

It was entirely Percy Pitt's manner, to welcome anything which might increase the sphere of music, and to ignore the voices which called it 'popular,' and beneath the dignity of a musician. His career might almost have seemed that of a man designed by Providence to be on the spot when broadcasting began. He had never refused to make the best of what material offered, and, where he could not have the highest *kind*, to raise a lesser kind to its highest excellence. He had written solemn symphonies, but he had never disdained to write waltz movements. He had conducted great masterpieces, but he had not refused to conduct light opera. In his hands such works became charming musical achievements without losing their popular appeal. The B.B.C. in its

laudable determination to have a genuine musician as its musical adviser, and thus escape the perils of pandering to an unformed taste, exposed itself on the other hand to the danger of being over the heads of the public. It could not have made a more inspired choice than Percy Pitt.

The musical policy of the B.B.C., which he initiated, was to 'keep on the upper side' of public taste, but still in touch with it: not forgetting the music hall, musical comedy, and dance-band taste, but giving the stuff good of its kind: with an occasional programme which would be definitely over the heads of the general public, for the sake of minorities which also existed and had rights. In carrying out this policy, and indeed any programme of any sort, it met with strong opposition at first from almost every institution upon whose ground it seemed to be poaching. Newspapers objected to its giving news; theatres would not allow it to try and broadcast plays; concert societies dismally prophesied that no one would come out to hear music when it could be had at home; gramophones and pianolas raised their plaintive tones; artists of all sorts, if they consented to broadcast, were in danger of losing all their other engagements.

That opera made a fairly quick start in the new medium was due to Percy Pitt's position as liaison officer. The British National Opera Company was now functioning and flourishing as well as could be expected, that is, anxiously and precariously. It had opened with a season at Covent Garden in May, 1922—just when the B.B.C. was being created—with *La Bohème*, which Pitt conducted. There was Wagner,

some old and new stock, and an Offenbach 'novelty,' the *Goldsmith of Toledo*. Coates, Goossens, Julius Harrison, and Aylmer Buesst were the other conductors. In the winter it gave a short season, in which one of the operas which Pitt conducted was Humperdinck's *Hänsel and Gretel*. Who first proposed broadcasting an opera cannot be said. Perhaps Mr. Pitt, the musical adviser to the B.B.C., approached Mr. Pitt, the musical director of the B.N.O.C., and suggested the experiment. Mr. Pitt of the B.N.O.C. returned a courteous answer, and on January 6, 1923, at a matinée, he conducted a performance of *Hänsel and Gretel* which was broadcast entire—the first broadcast in Europe of any opera.

Although concert managers' mistrust of broadcasting had some plausibility, it was hard to see how the microphone could do other than help opera, as, in Pitt's opinion, it did. Until television is perfected—and perhaps after that—broadcast opera can never be anything but a *pis aller* for opera on the stage. Those who care only for the musical element are seldom opera enthusiasts at all; those who do like opera like it precisely for its combination of the romance of music with the romance of the theatre, with the beauty of human movements and scenic colour, and the sweet and fleeting pleasure of stage illusion. To hear the musical beauties of a favourite opera broadcast could only make such hearers resolve on going to see it again at the first opportunity; while millions, who had never seen it or thought of seeing it, began to—wish it were possible to see it.

Percy Pitt maintained that broadcasting increased box-office receipts; and certainly the B.N.O.C. was

not incontinently slain. In 1923 it again gave a spring season at Covent Garden, producing a new English opera, Gustav Holst's *Perfect Fool*; while Melba, who except for Beecham's 1919 season had not sung at Covent Garden since before the War, reappeared in *La Bohème* when Percy Pitt conducted its 150th performance at the Opera House. Habitues mourned the departed glories of a 'Melba night' in the old days, the glittering audience, the air of its being a great Society occasion; still more the change that time had made in the great singer's voice. 'It was the saddest evening I ever spent at Covent Garden,' Percy Colson wrote when he heard her during that season in *Faust*; the tenor was poor—that could not be said of the *Bohème* tenor, Joseph Hislop—Marguerite, alas! was sixty-two, and 'the voice was only the ghost of that silvery wonder of former years.' It is hard at such times to believe that the world can still go on. But so, as Melba rose, Albani set; and there was something which had not disappeared with the diamonds among the shabby music-lovers of 1923.

At the close of that year the B.N.O.C., reviewing its position, found that it was £1,863 down. But this was nothing to worry about. The enterprise was still young, and its reception had been flattering; by extending the number of working weeks and possibly including Ireland in its itinerary it expected to make up the deficit. There was talk of a second company to visit the smaller towns. Another device which made for economy was the new scenic method, by which the stage pictures were obtained by lighting alone, on a stage draped and floored with black.

While the seventeen scenes of the *Magic Flute* had formerly required two trucks for its scenery, at 10½*d.* per mile per truck, it now travelled on one truck with five other operas ; and as the company was on tour most of the year, this was a great saving. The *Magic Flute*—Percy Pitt was very much attached to Mozart—was also the opera which was given at the special children's performances. Its story, which was apt to puzzle grown-ups unacquainted with the history of Freemasonry, could be accepted by children at its face value as a fairy-tale. Percy Pitt hoped to extend this educational idea, having, he considered, several operas in the répertoire which children would like : *Hänsel and Gretel*, the *Golden Cockerel*, the *Cricket on the Hearth*, and the *Barber of Seville*.

1924 was the year of the Wembley Exhibition. As great numbers of colonial visitors were expected, the B.N.O.C. looked forward to showing them what the old country could do in the way of opera ; and it accordingly applied for Covent Garden for the summer season. Unluckily it had occurred to others that while the Wembley sun shone they might suitably make hay. Between Beecham's failure and the B.N.O.C.'s beginning, Covent Garden, but for some out-of-season Carl Rosa, had been 'given over to boxing and cinemas,' and since then the two English opera companies had had the Opera House all to themselves. It was therefore with dismay that they began to hear rumours of the Syndicate's having invited the Viennese Opera Company over for the grand season of 1924.

The little squabble which blew up over the incident must have been rather grimly entertaining to Percy

PERCY PITT ADDRESSING HIMSELF



Pitt. The two parties to the old and ever-new debate as to English opera at last came to open battle. The rather bitter joke of it was that the Syndicate, which now appeared lance in rest under the foreign flag, had for years numbered him, a convinced opera-in-Englischer, among its henchmen. It was only now that it showed its colours.

Although objection to the Viennese Company's visit was first raised by the Musicians' Union, in the form of a protest against 'the importation of foreign musicians,' that was not exactly the issue for the B.N.O.C. Nor did the British Company claim that English art, good or bad, should have the right to exclude foreign art. When the Minister of Labour, in consequence of the appeal of the Musicians' Union, approached the B.N.O.C., it willingly consented to share the season with the Vienna Company—five or six weeks' British following seven weeks' Viennese. The Syndicate had no objection, 'provided a certain stated rent was guaranteed for the season as a whole.' But finding that the Viennese Company could not come so early, and also fearing that the expense of the visit would not be worth its while for less than a ten-weeks' season, the Syndicate became alarmed lest it should 'end by having no tenant at all,' or one 'on very disadvantageous terms,' and withdrew its consent.

Meanwhile the matter had been taken up in the Press. Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Sir Hugh Allen, respectively Principal of the R.A.M. and Director of the R.C.M., wrote to *The Times* to say that though they and many others would like to hear the Viennese Company, they felt that the B.N.O.C. ought not to be refused this particular opportunity, when all other

British and colonial products were being exhibited, of appearing in 'the home of English opera.' A letter in the *Telegraph* also thought that the B.N.O.C. should not, on such an occasion, be debarred from 'our own opera-house.' The Syndicate was ruffled. It replied indignantly that the writers had no business to call Covent Garden their own opera-house ; it was the opera-house of those who paid for it, namely, the shareholders of the Syndicate, and its subscribers and patrons. It warmly protested against the British National Opera Company's calling itself by such a title, when its *répertoire* was chiefly foreign ; and could not imagine why such people 'should consider that they have any claim to perform indifferent translations at our theatre to the exclusion of those who prefer to produce operas in the original language.' But it did not stop at that. 'The statement that Covent Garden Theatre is the home of English opera,' it said roundly, 'is about as absurd a misrepresentation as could possibly be made' ; it was the home of foreign opera principally ; and such a novelty as a season of opera in English had only been allowed to get a footing through the B.N.O.C., 'owing to fortuitous circumstances.' Operas should be sung 'in the language in which they were written. That is the right way to produce opera.' And it was constantly being 'asked by the habitués of Covent Garden, "When are you going to give us real grand opera again?"'

'Is it not a grave reflection on the Grand Opera Syndicate,' mildly inquired *A Patron of the B.N.O.C.*, that it is *not* the home of British opera, 'and that its chairman should be moved to anger by the mere thought?' Sir Charles Stanford also addressed to

The Times a defence of the B.N.O.C.'s title, on the ground that to begin by singing the existent foreign opera in English was the way to encourage operas to be written in that tongue ; observing that foreign managements used translations. Higgins indeed had himself let slip the observation that in Berlin one heard *Faust* in German, and in Paris Wagner in French. But it would not do. It was all a question of money, as the Syndicate eventually blurted out ; they looked to the summer season to keep them going, and a short lease to the B.N.O.C. did not give them a high enough rent.

And the end of it all was that the Austrian Company withdrew its visit, in consequence of the musical trade union's attitude, and the Syndicate announced ' other arrangements,' so that the British Company could not have the theatre either. Eventually a Syndicate season of the usual international type was given.

Shade of Hans Richter ! It was an Austrian Company, ironically enough, in whose cause the English Syndicate thus finally rejected the ideal of the great Austrian conductor. Percy Pitt must have been half-glad that his old friend had not lived to know that their hopes of the Syndicate had been sheer illusion. As far as that went, they might have spared their efforts for an English *Ring* ; for the directors had never believed that opera in English could pay, and consequently could not really be expected to stage it. Nevertheless, their efforts had not been quite in vain. They had helped to advertise the idea of English opera among the public, which, as the Vienna controversy showed, was beginning to take a real interest in it. The public enthusiasm was

not indeed altogether æsthetic ; it was not entirely inspired by the hope that opera in English would eventually extend the influence in England of opera and of music in general, but was partly due to the economic motive of hostility to foreign competition. However, we live in Europe, not in Utopia ; and experience shows that nothing ever really does get moving without an economic shove behind. ‘ We are all disappointed,’ Mackenzie wrote to Percy Pitt, ‘ at the upshot of the controversy.’ But the course of it might rather have been regarded as encouraging.

It was not in conjunction with the B.N.O.C., however, that Percy Pitt was to serve it in future. His two jobs were becoming too much for him. The B.B.C. work had increased beyond all expectation ; and if it was to go on, he would evidently have to choose between it and the opera company. At the moment the B.B.C. musical side was having heavy weather. The discontent of the older concerns had come to a head ; in the words of *The Times*, ‘ The entertainment industry has now openly avowed its opposition to the broadcasting of plays, music, songs and all other forms of entertainment, and steps are being taken to protect the interests of the entertainment world in the matter.’ The committees which were dealing with it, *The Times* added, represented ‘ theatres, variety theatres and cinemas ; copyright owners and music publishers ; concert givers and concert agents ; actors, artists and others employed in the entertainment industry.’ Representatives of the Executive Committee of the Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers met representatives of the B.B.C. and complained that copyrights were being

infringed. The Concert Artists' Association held a meeting, attended by the representatives of everything, including the B.B.C., at which a letter from Messrs. Cramer was read, stating that broadcasting was injuring both their firm itself and concert artists. The Theatrical Managers' Association intervened to prevent George Robey and Billy Merson from taking part, as agreed, in a B.B.C. concert given to celebrate the Duke of York's wedding. Messrs. Chappell notified the artists of the B.N.O.C. that if they continued to take part in broadcast operas they would be ineligible to appear at the Queen's Hall concerts. But what aroused most interest among the public was the action of the same firm in preventing the broadcasting of a speech by the Prince of Wales, at a concert given under the auspices of the British Legion. Chappell's did not object to the broadcasting of the Prince's speech ; but they refused to have a broadcasting cable laid to Queen's Hall, where the speech was to be made.

Messrs. Chappell, no doubt, have long been able to smile as they review these olden wars ; but at the moment there were wigs on the green. The attention attracted by the episode of the royal speech caused Mr. William Boosey, of Chappell's, to write to the Press and explain that his firm was merely in line with all the rest of the entertainment industry. He brought a formidable list of his allies.

The whole of the theatrical managers and the directors of the big music halls and revues, including Sir Alfred Butt, Sir Oswald Stoll, Mr. R. H. Gillespie, Mr. Walter Payne and Mr. Charles Gulliver, are all opposed to broadcasting under present conditions. Every concert giver of importance is opposed to it.

I include the names of Messrs. Boosey & Co., Enoch & Sons, Cramer & Co., Lionel Powell, with his enormous series of celebrity concerts both in London and the provinces, and Mr. Henry Mills, the organizer of the popular Sunday League Concerts, also all the important concert agents, such as Messrs. Ibbs & Tillett, Daniel Mayer & Co., L. G. Sharpe, E. L. Robinson and the directors of the Albert Hall, the Aeolian Hall, the Wigmore Hall, the Central Hall, Westminster. Sir Henry Wood and Sir Landon Ronald are on our side, as also Sir Dan Godfrey and Mr. Walter Hedgecock of the Crystal Palace.

Then, seizing an enormous bouquet, he impulsively presented it to Percy Pitt. 'The only people of position in the musical world who have adopted an opposite attitude are Mr. Percy Pitt and the artists of the National Opera Company.'

Perhaps Percy Pitt had hardly been aware, himself, of his pioneering distinction, nor that the fresh fields into which he had guided his companions concealed so many tomahawks. The danger, however, was less fearful than it seemed. The entertainment industry was active and almost united ; but the artists were not as unanimous as the impresarios, and as for the public, the really decisive factor, its interests were with broadcasting. It had naturally no spontaneous desire to be docked of the nightly music, which it heard for 10s. a year, in order to pay highly for hearing an occasional performance outside or else go without ; and the incident of the royal speech crystallized its feeling. Many were the letters, from listeners of all ranks and degrees of education, which the B.B.C. received for its encouragement. 'Congratulations,' wrote one enthusiast, 'to the opera artists who dared

Messrs. Chappell also set the foundations and given the lead, "For Freedom." They have struck a (what must be) milestone in the history of Freedom—a painful-sounding exploit which the writer wished to see immortalized by 'a lasting Memento.' Their most lasting Memento, however, was an agreed peace. The copyright question was settled, the dreaded injuries to the older organizations were found to be in most cases illusory, and if the band, in many small functions, flower shows and the like, did give way to the wireless, the instrumentalists found compensation in the enormous increase of wireless work, not only at the broadcasting stations but in public concerts given under their auspices. The B.B.C. began with a series of symphony concerts at the Central Hall, Westminster, conducted by Percy Pitt. The first one, in February, 1924, certainly had a most intriguing programme—Ravel's *Mother Goose*, Bizet's first *Arlésienne* suite, Saint-Saëns' *Violin Concerto*, Chabrier's *España* and D'Indy's *Istar*. But these and other expanding activities were making Percy Pitt's work for the B.B.C. a wholetime job. It was plain that he must choose between it and the opera company.

He could not hesitate. It is not necessary to suppose that he was totally indifferent to the financial side of the question. He was fifty-five; and the steady paid job with the B.B.C. was more suitable than the hazardous partnership in the operatic enterprise. But apart from such considerations altogether, it was impossible to turn his back on the herald of the future. The opera company was such an institution as he had been working with all his life: with aims progressive indeed, but not new: with limited opportunities:

hampered even within its own bounded sphere. Broadcasting was a new power, and a mighty one : with the resources of the nation behind it, with all the world as its field of action : with virgin fields before it, and an influence of which no one could foretell the development and the result. Here at last was the flood of music which Percy Pitt had so long desired. And he was to reign supreme, a river god, at the source.

In March, 1924, he resigned from the B.N.O.C., which bade him good-bye with many expressions of regret, and turned entirely to the work of broadcasting.

CHAPTER XII

The B.B.C.

In five years, towards the end of his life, Percy Pitt did his most important work. Not that it was better work than any he had done before ; but it was done in a position which gave it a much wider, a world-wide influence.

Much, much good seed had died in consequence of the War ; but wireless communication was a strong and vital growth. It is still young, and its development is still incalculable ; but the form which its growth has so far taken was the work of those who had it in hand in the twenties of the century. In 1924 it had still the charm of an experimental enterprise conducted by enthusiasts. In the two hectic years since its birth, inadequately housed, devoid of experience, with nearly everything to find out and everything to organize, it had been in that state when everybody lends a hand at everything, anxious only to make the thing go, and not, as yet, fearful of poaching on someone else's department. Engineers would not yet drop dead at the idea of anyone else touching a microphone ; and almost all the staff would lend a hand with the Children's Hour. ' Uncle Arthur ' of that innocent interlude was Arthur Burrows, who was programme director, going on in 1925 to be Secretary-General of the International Broadcasting

Union of Geneva. Captain Eckersley joined up as chief engineer in 1923. There was Rex Palmer, 'Uncle Rex,' London Station director, who could sing too in an emergency ; R. E. Jeffery, productions director, who had the dramatic side in hand ; John Stobart, education director, responsible for the talks and lectures and the religious broadcasts, with which he was in sincere sympathy. Stanton Jefferies, as musical director, had done admirable work ; indeed, it was his own achievement that the musical side had acquired its remarkable importance, and now demanded the special services of a man of Percy Pitt's masterhood.

Among this band of brothers 'the Maestro' moved brotherly. 'Few of us,' wrote Eckersley, 'will ever forget his genial helpfulness. Was it, in early days, a question of an orchestra's balance, the proper connection of a microphone outfit, "Mr. Pitt," in his shirt-sleeves, enduring the awful studio atmosphere, was always there to help, advise and encourage.' He was so good at all that kind of thing, that some people, misled by the time-honoured idea of the artist as a mere helpless chaos of temperament, imagined that his business and administrative side was in fact the stronger. But that was not the impression of his fellow-workers. 'Percy Pitt was essentially an artist and never a bureaucrat' ; though 'this is not to say that our musical director ever denied the necessity for organization. The B.B.C. music department to-day is more suitably equipped, in its personnel, to cope with the technicalities of its subject than any other. This tradition was Percy Pitt's creation.' And it was Captain Eckersley also,

the technician, who rather than any more definitely literary appreciator said the best thing about Percy Pitt at the B.B.C., which with the omission of one word would be an equally good summing-up of his whole career : ' He felt simply that his function was to create broadcast music.'

He created it by organizing, by selecting artists, by rehearsing, by conducting, by any job that came to hand ; but his enormous value to the enterprise was not such spade-work, valuable though it was. It lay in qualifications which no one else possessed, in a range of experience and influence absolutely unique. The British Broadcasting Company at the time was so far from having any standing in the musical world, that it was definitely despised and disliked by a strong minority of eminent musicians as a sort of mechanical music-maker, an enemy to artistic excellence ; and by the great majority simply ignored as a popular toy. Like a student beginning his career, it stood timidly, music in hand, waiting for a chance to show the great ones of the musical world what it could do. And, like those kind *maestri* of his own youth, Percy Pitt gave it its letters of introduction. He knew all about music, knew the best that existed, the most appropriate in particular circumstances ; he could tell his young organization what to play, and how to play it ; and he could find the right man, the great singer for the great song, the composer or conductor for the planned occasion, and still more than that, he could enlist these great people, who were his personal friends. Many a one, like Henry Wood, consented to broadcast at his instance, who simply had not thought about it.

Many a foreigner of eminence came over at his invitation, and as his guest, to sing or conduct. Wood, Elgar, Hamilton Harty, Albert Coates, Landon Ronald—Strauss, Molinari, Ansermet, Brecher, Schercher, Bruno Walter—a few names recalled at random. Siegfried Wagner came gaily from Bayreuth, full of pleasure at seeing his old friend again, and inquiring charmingly whether there was ‘any good Shakespeare-performance going on? Or some other thrilling thing? Good dancing? I remember a charming evening at the Empire, lovely ballet and delicious clowns! Something genuine English!’ and asking on behalf of his wife whether there would be any audience present at Broadcasting house for the concert he was to conduct—‘for her dressing. Very important thing for a lady!!!’

Such visits had quite a different atmosphere from those paid by forlorn and hurried strangers; the visitors came to a friend and almost a fellow-countryman.

His knowledge of the whole world’s music and musicians [wrote a colleague] is all-embracing like an encyclopædia, and more trustworthy than most of these. Whoever is making music anywhere in the world, the Maestro knows what manner of man he is, how he plays or conducts, or what his composition may be worth. An opera, a symphony, a piece of any order, may belong to the seventeenth century or may have appeared yesterday; he can tell you with unfailing accuracy all that anyone need know of it. His is not merely a superhuman memory; it is a history of music.

He could remember anything in that connection; even to the artists, at ten years’ interval, who had

taken part in a particular performance. His knowledge of Continental languages was naturally a great advantage. 'Because he is a master of his art, a thorough Englishman, and a real cosmopolitan all at once—a true citizen of the world—it can be fearlessly said that there is none like him.'

In addition, he had no axe, even of the most honourable nature, to grind : no institution to foster : no pupils to place. He stood above all sectional interests, and was as free, as any human being can ever be free, to devote himself without prejudice and without distraction to the best interests of his art. The world of music was the B.B.C's oyster, which 'l'illustrissimo carissimo Maestro' proceeded to open.

The first step was to increase the orchestra. The small band of nine musicians was first augmented by Percy Pitt's little friend the celesta, to represent the wood-wind parts, and a cornet and trombone. Then came a single wood-wind and two horns ; which necessitated strengthening the bass with a contra-bassoon, until, within a short time, 2LO had its complete standing orchestra of 37 picked players, employed on the 'no deputy' system, and augmented to 50, 60 or 70 for the classics, important visits of outside conductors, and opera. In bringing this about, there was occasionally some want of understanding to be overcome on the part of the non-musical authorities at the station. Why, it was once urged, should they go to the expense of two clarionets ? why not have one and put it closer to the mike ? Percy Pitt would not have betrayed by the flicker of an eyelid what he thought of such a suggestion. Another time, when the trumpeter had been put in

the corridor in order to obtain the effect of distance, a zealous official rushed up and seized the instrument. 'Hush, hush!' he cried; 'don't you hear they're broadcasting in the studio?'

The music given covered practically the whole field of music, from 'light,' or even 'low,' to the supreme classics and the ultra-modern. The orchestra thus became admirably versatile, since, though augmented for the 'heavier' work, it was fundamentally the same for every kind. The lighter orchestral programmes were committed to men who shared Percy Pitt's views as to their conscientious performance: who could say like John Ansell, appointed conductor in 1926, that they had 'a very sincere regard for light music,' and thought it was 'as worthy of good performance as the classics.' There was plenty of such 'popular music,' and at least once a week a serious concert performance. By the end of 1924 eight other large cities in the United Kingdom had their stations, and 'standard music'—those works of established masters which will be played as long as men have ears—was performed by all according to a concerted scheme, to prevent overlapping. London made a regular feature of contemporary chamber music; a series was organized each season 'with the specific object of presenting to British listeners something of the latest development in the chamber music of all schools and countries.' Programmes were also given periodically, devoted to the works of a musician or a national school—Wagner, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Dvořák, a Hungarian programme, and so on—which were chosen and conducted by Percy Pitt. Then there were the public concerts at Covent

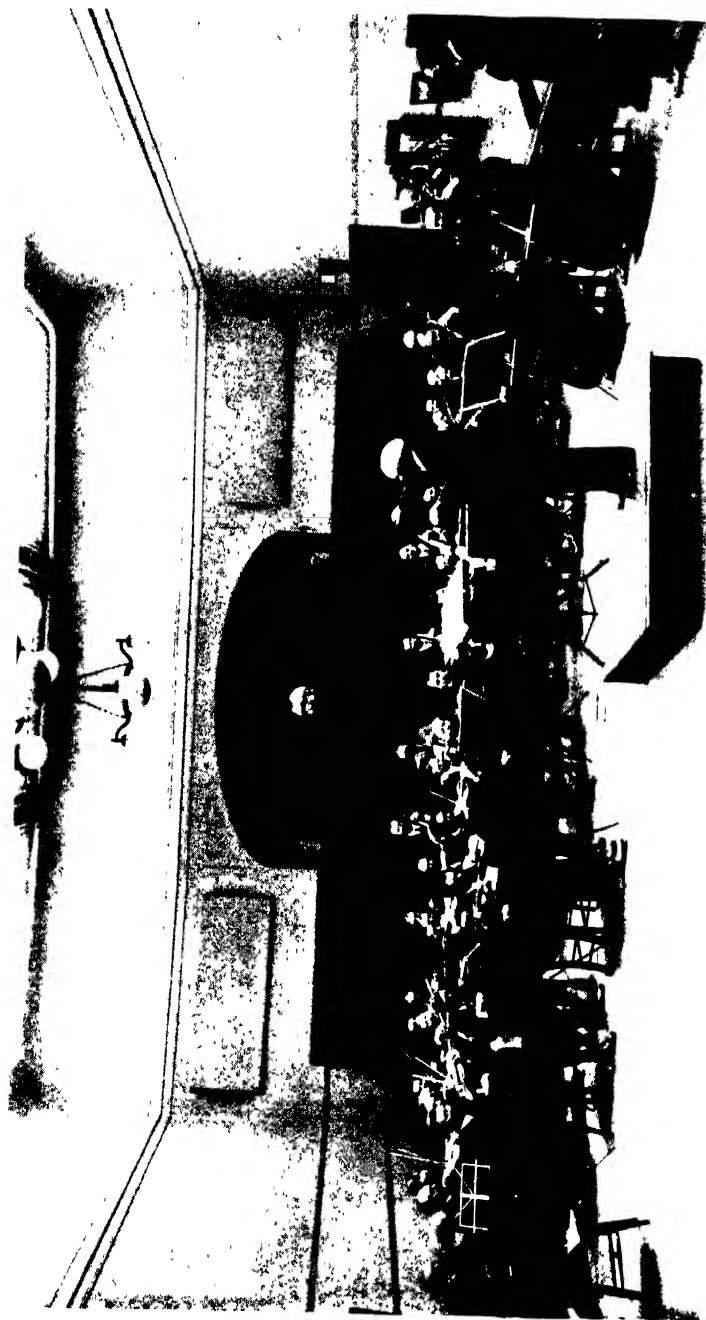
Garden, the Albert Hall, and later, when Chappell's came round, the Queen's Hall ; and of these Percy Pitt generally conducted one in each series, the others being taken by invitation by other celebrated English conductors. It was Percy Pitt who saw to it on these occasions that the reproduction should be correct. The scene when the Albert Hall was being got ready for the first B.B.C. 'National Concert' amused the reporters. An engineer, 'crawling like a human fly in the great dome,' slung the microphone so that it should hang just behind the conductor's head. While Sir Hamilton Harty rehearsed the orchestra, Percy Pitt, underneath the stage, was listening in, and dictating the exact position of the mike. 'Too much on the violins.' It was like getting the range for artillery fire, one of the newspaper men thought ; until at last Mr. Pitt could say, 'The balance between the wood-wind and the strings is just right.'

But in the matter of actual conducting Percy Pitt's most regular practice was in opera.

The success of *The Magic Flute* had been such that it was quickly followed by *Hänsel and Gretel*, *Pagliacci*, *Siegfried*, the *Marriage of Figaro*, *Faust*, *Madame Butterfly* ; and by a performance which made something of an epoch, *La Bohème*, with Melba in her famous part. Melba had from the first been a good friend to broadcasting, and the example of an artist of her rank patronizing the ether was excellent for that much-snubbed younger brother of the air. Other operas were also broadcast. But the times at which the performances were held in the opera house did not always fit in conveniently with the B.B.C. scheme, and their length was greater than

the programmes usually allowed for. In 1925 Percy Pitt conducted the first operatic performance in the studio, by the B.B.C's own orchestra and chorus, and thereafter opera was given from 2LO once a month, though operas from without were also persevered with.

Both plans had their adherents. Some people thought that a performance from the studio lacked something of the life of a performance on the stage ; and this seems psychologically probable. Others did not think so ; and there were some definite advantages attached to the studio opera. Not only could the hours be suited to the convenience of listeners, but the opera itself could be adapted to the changed conditions. And if at first sight it might seem sacrilegious to modify the works of famous composers, it was no more so than an ' arrangement ' of a master for a different instrument. When the element of sight was gone, some passages were less easily intelligible or less arresting ; and where the modifying was done by the master hand of a musician who thoroughly understood and ardently sympathized with his subject, it could never be felt as an injury. Even those, who knew an opera well enough to recognize where a change was made, did not always consider it a change for the worse. ' Your tempi,' wrote Hermann Klein upon a studio broadcast of *Ivanhoe*, ' and the cuts you introduced, would have improved it on the stage and made it more popular.' The amount of work involved was enormous, as many as 17 rehearsals for one performance : a fact suggestive of one reason for Percy Pitt's success in what he undertook.



PERCY PITT CONDUCTING THE BBC ORCHESTRA

THE LANCET 1940

Covent Garden raised no objection to broadcast opera in any form. Colonel Blois, managing director of the Covent Garden Opera Company which had succeeded the Syndicate, was warmly in its favour. 'Our box office results have improved year by year, and there is no doubt that a good proportion of the increased receipts is due to broadcasting and the resulting wish of listeners to see the great singers on the stage'—stars being still the *idée fixe* of the Opera House. Perhaps the listeners-in had also some idea of seeing the opera.

In the recent tour of our English company in the provinces we found that a large part of our audiences had been attracted by earlier broadcasts from Covent Garden. My own opinion is that in thus promoting public interest in operatic music, broadcasting, so far from being parasitical, is doing invaluable service to composers and performers and to the cause of music generally.

These observations were called forth by some lively comments from Sir Thomas Beecham, who had described broadcasting as 'a parasite.' He was the most outspoken among the musicians who disliked the wireless, having already expressed his views with great energy when in 1926 the Broadcasting Company was transformed into a Broadcasting Corporation with government support. More afflicted by the existing imperfections of transmission than excited by its possibilities, Sir Thomas had declared that, with the subsidizing of the wireless, English music had arrived at its final ruin, and that he himself should leave his demented country, never to return. 'As for the Government, I suppose the next thing

they will subsidize will be toy balloons or mechanical mice to amuse the children.'

That broadcast music did at least amuse 'the children'—that is, the unlearned in music—to a quite amazing extent was becoming evident. When a little later a farmer's lad heard Percy Pitt's name mentioned, he observed, 'Wasn't it him that conducted the Symphony Concerts?' So widespread was already the influence, in such large measure Percy Pitt's own, which had made symphony concerts a familiar feature of a cowman's life—even if, as is possible, Charlie, at present, preferred jazz.

It was only for seven years altogether that Percy Pitt was on the staff of the B.B.C. ; and only for five that he gave it all his time. The fact, and the result, proved with what whole-hearted zeal, and with what steady devotion, he laboured during that short period. He had never been busier. But now, after so long a bachelorhood, he had the comfort of a home of his own.

He married in 1925.

Mrs. Percy Pitt was herself a busy woman. Her career as Margaret Bruce, the Australian singer, had been interrupted by the War, when she came to England as the wife of Commander G. L. Browne, R.N. Since the War she had supported herself and her two children by working as a musical coach, and had been Dinh Gilly's partner in his ambitious but abortive scheme of a College of Dramatic Music. After her second marriage she continued her work.

With his usual reserve, Percy Pitt had invited no one to his wedding, and had been married three months before his friends knew it. Neither did he

at first move house ; but six months later they moved into a comparatively large house in Broadhurst Gardens, Hampstead. There at last he was able to reproduce in his turn the conditions which had so much charmed him in his youth, when he frequented the houses of great artists and musical amateurs. His own house was now open on Sundays, the only leisured day, to artists of all sorts. Some old friends were gone ; but there were plenty of younger ones. Of these the dearest perhaps was one of whom he said, that if he had had a son he would have liked him to be like Eugène Goossens. But there were many others too, whose affection was pleasant to him, whose careers he followed with interest, or whose beginnings he fostered : who came joyfully, as he had come in his time, to the maestro's house, and met there artists great and small, distinguished foreigners and home-grown celebrities, operatic stars or gifted dilettanti : all busy either in serious discussion, or in making music, or sometimes in merely larking according to the regrettable habit of artists. Their host was not above hoaxing the company with a 'duet by Wagner,' played impromptu by two of his young friends, Reginald Gardiner and Henry Kendall, to his impassioned conducting. Elgar's seventieth birthday was a grand 'rag' (though not at Broadhurst Gardens). He had been melancholy enough about it beforehand, writing that he dreaded 'the pestilential day,' and proposing 'to cut the whole country' and not come back till it was over—'and, after all, the seventieth birthday (seventy *first* I mean) may not arrive and it would be better for all if it did not. "Pass the veronal." ' It was

quite like him, that the actual occasion, when he was presented at rehearsal with a silver salver, was wildly gay ; and the eminent persons present ended, as a beholder observed, by 'ragging like children.' No doubt there was more sheer nonsense and laughter, in an English salon of Percy Pitt's elder years, than in those Continental ones of his morning ; it was as much a sign of the times as a mark of the nation. The post-War world, like Elgar, was heavy-hearted, and laughed the more.

And now Percy Pitt's friends were at last able to see him at home, and found him, as might be expected, exactly what he was abroad. He would no more obtrude his personal feelings upon his nearest and dearest, than upon the most indifferent business colleague. He would no more relax his self-command and indulge his moods after the day's work, according to the habit of most men, than on the opera stage or in the broadcasting studio. He would do as many odd jobs ; and it was characteristic of him that he would never hesitate to do anything, although, as a pianist, he was so careful of his hands that he always put on gloves for such work. He had long abandoned his early smoking habits, which indeed had threatened him at about forty with nicotine poisoning ; since then he had not smoked at all. He had the same cheerful little catchwords. 'It's a good little game—played slowly !' when people were getting hot and bothered. His very dissent or disapproval had something kindly, as his juniors at work had long found ; they used to say, that even his criticisms were heartening. He never made the blunderer feel depressed or foolish, but seemed to

understand that he was doing his best and wanted help. One such young singer, when she had achieved success, wrote him a letter which might have expressed the feeling of many another :

Ever so often I've tried to write this letter and failed, but I've simply *got* to do it, so here goes!!

Since 1923 when you first gave me my chance with the British National Opera Company, you have been the best friend I have had in the musical world, and I just want you to know how sincerely I feel and appreciate all you have done for me, in spite of the fact that I have failed you more than once. I think it has been so wonderful of you to always give me a second chance.

If it doesn't sound cheek—may I say that if at any time I can render you a service I will count it a great honour to be called upon to do so.

Thanking you again for the faith you have placed in me and my work and assuring you that I am working hard to prove worthy of it.

There was one musician whose work was seldom heard from 2LO, and that was Percy Pitt. 'It is only with difficulty,' said the writer of an article in the *Radio Times*, 'that Percy Pitt can be induced to bring forward his own music. He has held many posts which less modest people would have seized on as chances for thrusting themselves into the lime-light, but in which he has worked with a quiet efficiency rather on behalf of music itself.' On one occasion, however, he was prevailed on to conduct an hour or so of his own works : giving, on January 4, 1926—his birthday—what even so might be described as a programme as little his own as possible : his *English Rhapsody* (folk tunes) : *Paolo and Francesca*,

Prelude Act II (another man's subject) : *Cinderella* waltz (folk story) : *Springtime Serenade* : *Ballade for Violin and Orchestra* (associated with Ysaye) : and *Sakura* suite.

In the same year he took part in the melancholy ceremony of Melba's farewell to the stage. A year previously he had been one of the conductors at Madame Albani's benefit ; but that was less sad, because the wrench, the parting, was long over. The aged singer came back only to be presented with music, bouquets, and compliments, upon her nomination as a Dame of the Order of the British Empire ; but Melba, at her ' Farewell to the People ' upon the stage of the Old Vic in 1926, sang for the last time. The passages she chose were Act II of *Roméo et Juliette*, which Percy Pitt conducted, and Acts IV of *Otello* and III and IV of *La Bohème*.

I had been too saddened on that evening at Covent Garden in 1923 [wrote her biographer] and feared to go, but Percy Pitt told me afterwards that her voice had once again almost the morning freshness and beauty of old times. ' The pain and the pleasure of it brought tears to my eyes,' he said.

It was Percy Pitt's first association with the Old Vic, but not his last.

His knowledge and experience [in the words of Miss Baylis] were, of course, invaluable on such an important occasion, and it was with great pleasure that we welcomed him as a member of the Governing Body in 1928, and knew that these gifts were unreservedly at our service. The width of his musical grasp was unique, and he was generous in giving time to our problems—suggesting suitable music for ballets, considering the choice of additions to the

opera repertory, enlisting the services of new artists, and generally doing all in his power to ease our work. He helped us to obtain reasonable royalty terms for some operas new to our repertory, by explaining our position as no outsider could have done, and no one less well-known already to the firms concerned. Everyone will have paid tribute to the tremendous range of his musicianship, but perhaps in no other place could this have been so appreciated as here, where a People's Theatre was struggling to establish Opera and Ballet as part of the artistic routine of the life of the capital, and where, as there was no money to lose on experiments—scarcely any to meet the cost of a new setting—nothing novel could be undertaken lightheartedly, but only after serious consideration, and the wisest advice.

The days were too short for all there was to do. In 1928 the Pitts had tried the experiment of living at Rickmansworth for the sake of the small stepson, who was terribly delicate; but the daily journey was too much, and the expense had now to be thought of. For Percy Pitt's time at the B.B.C. was drawing to a close. The age limit was sixty; and he reached it in January, 1929.

His retirement caused something like consternation among listeners. It was almost impossible to think of the B.B.C. without him. To many, who had not been among the early enthusiasts, he appeared coeval with broadcasting, and to be a sort of spirit of English ether, as, to those born during her reign, Queen Victoria had appeared a sort of incarnation of English monarchy. The Corporation warmly acknowledged its loss.

Most of us could lay down our tasks at any moment [it said in 1930, in a biographical note appended to

the programme of a B.B.C. concert] in the comfortable, though humbling certainty that someone else could easily be found to do them quite as well, perhaps much better. But here and there in the world are men *who cannot be replaced at all*, and Percy Pitt is most emphatically one of them.

This statement, lest it should appear too disheartening, was slightly modified in print, but remained the inmost sentiment of his colleagues.

To-day, when broadcasting has done more in seven years than any other influence in the centuries before, to make music part of the common man's inheritance of culture and delight, Percy Pitt may well look back upon a truly amazing achievement ; without his vision, his unique knowledge and experience, the music of the B.B.C. could never have won its foremost place in the world's art.

And he heard from Gustav Holst :

You may be interested to know that a friend of mine who has been travelling in Germany lately was told by everyone that the B.B.C. programmes are the best radio ones in the world. Now that you are getting a well-deserved holiday I hope that you realize that it has all been jolly well worth while.

Yes, the 'holiday' was well-deserved, and had not come too soon ; but there was another side to that. Sir Hamilton Harty, who thought that Pitt had resigned voluntarily, wrote to hope that it was not for reasons of health : ' you certainly appeared to be doing the deuce of a lot of work for the B.B.C.' If there was now less work, there was also less pay, and troubles had begun to gather just when he was, to an extent quite unsuspected by those around him, less capable of surmounting them.

The 'depression' was now in full swing, and everyone felt the pinch. Elgar had already deplored on his own behalf that the War had left him 'without the means of much hospitality': adding, a little later, 'I have not received a dividend from any one thing this year! we live in larky times, God wot!' Apart from such general causes, particular circumstances contributed to Percy Pitt's financial difficulties.

When his principal source of income, the engagement with the B.B.C., was about to come to an end, he had had every expectation of being provided with work only slightly less remunerative. He had agreed to become musical controller of the new National League of Opera in process of formation by Sir Thomas Beecham, which was to pay him a salary of £2,000 a year, Beecham meanwhile giving him a retaining fee. The League unfortunately never reached the stage of being incorporated as a company and issuing contracts; so that when it was abandoned Percy Pitt had no claim for anything but the balance of his retainer. Perhaps the disappointment was not so much of a lost opportunity as it seemed. To start a new enterprise, and that enterprise an attempt to make opera a going concern, must always have been exhausting, even if successful, and fearfully harassing if its fortunes declined; and though perhaps he did not quite realize it himself, he had lately had as much as he could do even on the velvet with which Broadcasting House had by now been so handsomely lined. The adventure scarcely affected his relations with his genial comrade. But meanwhile he had necessarily declined an approach from Colonel Blois of the sedater Covent Garden Opera Company.

Hitherto Percy Pitt had always lived within his income ; anything else would have affronted his punctilious habit of mind, and his conception of life as ruled by harmonious order ; but he had never had more than enough. His life's work, to such a large extent silent and hidden, had never been appreciated, hardly even heard of until the last few years, by the general public and its ruling powers—'I *wish* you had something fine in the way of lettering,' Elgar wrote wistfully, who had lately become Master of the King's Musick, 'but what is worth having?'—nor brought him in the tangible results of such recognition. He would have done better for himself, a friend thought, 'had he ever mastered that important instrument the trumpet': oddly coinciding in this with a critic, who, summing up his orchestral compositions, observed that 'the trumpets were the weak point.' Such a man as Percy Pitt would never be either rich, or free from claims. His marriage had not directly added to his expenses, since Mrs. Pitt contributed her full share to their income ; but it had no doubt inspired the move to Broadhurst Gardens, the resolve to have at last such a home as he had always felt to be the ideal, a home open to all kindred spirits ; and as the depression developed Broadhurst Gardens began to assume the character of an extravagance. While there, besides, he had had many guests, who might properly have been considered the concern of the B.B.C. But there was no entertainment allowance, and the celebrated foreigners, who came over as his personal friends at his personal instance, must be received in his own home, and be entertained both in and out of it.

Now the house was worse than a white elephant. Owing to a misconstruction of the terms of his lease, he sublet it on going to Rickmansworth, and became involved in a lawsuit on the subject which went against him. To aggravate his position, he found, like many others, that owing to the assessment of income tax upon a three-year basis he was still paying an unreduced tax although his income had dropped like a stone. On leaving Rickmansworth, the family returned to another studio in his old locale in Primrose Hill, as an economy.

He had not ceased all work for the B.B.C. On the contrary, his services were retained in a consultative capacity, and he usually conducted some six or eight concerts a month, including some at the People's Palace, Mile End Road, and continued to give occasional talks on music or musicians. He had given such a one upon Puccini, on the anniversary of his old friend's death in 1924. In his lecture on Strauss he had to make an apology, for a characteristic reason, for possible defects in his illustrative playing, asking the audience to 'make allowances for a crushed finger, the result of trying to make myself useful in helping to close the hood of a friend's motor-car.' In 1931 he was able to accept the offer of an engagement with the Covent Garden Company, although, for one who had once been 'enthroned' there, the opportunities of these latter days seemed limited and disheartening. 'I am so glad,' Elgar wrote, 'to hear you will be back at C.G.—do what you can.' He did what he could. In 1932 he founded the Opera Circle, of which he was the first President and Chairman, 'a musical and social

organization conducted on more or less intimate lines, with the object of helping to develop a greater taste for and understanding of opera generally.' It was to hold six monthly meetings, during the winter, 'for the discussion of new operas or talks on operatic art with musical "illustrations" by distinguished artists.' He himself gave the first lecture, at Lady Gatti's studio in Kensington in October, 1932, on Weinberger's *Schwanda the Piper*. With the object of bringing it within the reach of as many as possible the annual subscription was to be only £1. It was a labour of love, and though it was necessarily begun on a small scale, Percy Pitt's peculiar fitness, both musical and practical, for conducting such an organization was enough to guarantee it a future. By the end of the first year it numbered 250 members.

In doing what he could for another institution, he took part in a comical episode. Ricordi's brought an action against 'Herbert Clayton and Jack Waller and others' concerned in the musical comedy *Silver Wings* at the Dominion. A song called 'Asleep in my Heart' was alleged to be an infringement of the copyright of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, being taken, it was maintained, from the 'Humming Chorus.' Percy Pitt appeared as a witness, and illustrated his evidence upon the piano. As luck would naturally have it, in the next court sat Mr. Justice Eve, who held pianos in particular abhorrence, and could hardly believe his ears, as the strains of the accursed thing floated through the sacred precincts. 'Is anyone playing the piano?' he demanded; 'because if so, it ought to be stopped!' The matter being explained, the examining counsel suggested sending

the tipstaff to arrest the musician. However, he was spared ; but some inkling of the effect produced next door must have reached the musical litigants, for the next witness was implored ' not to play too loud.' As for the gramophones, which also gave evidence, it is to be hoped that they were at least used with the soft needle.

Unlike, probably, Mr. Justice Eve, Percy Pitt had no aversion to gramophones. While with the B.B.C. he had conducted its orchestra in making a number of records. Some of these were well-known favourites ; but that very circumstance threw his gifts as a conductor into high relief. Among such familiar things as a *Carmen* potpourri, Coleridge-Taylor's *Christmas Overture*, Puccini's *Witches' Dance*, Rossini's *Sémiramide* overture, one of the most familiar of all, Suppé's *Light Cavalry*, was greeted with immense applause ; freely described as ' hackneyed ' and ' tawdry ' in itself, but as one of the most brilliant performances upon the records. At other times he had recorded music nearer his own heart—from Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazounov, Tchaikovsky, Boccherini, Drigo, Wolf-Ferrari, Wagner. The B.B.C., while he was still with it, had refused to let him accept the offer of a directorship from a firm producing a combined wireless set and gramophone, much to his regret as it turned out ; the small regular sum would now have been valuable, and he was glad, in these difficult days, to be associated with other gramophone enterprises.

' I have had a frightful lot of trouble lately,' he wrote to Elgar in July, 1932. That kind faithful friend could well sympathize. ' Everyone seems to

feel the curious circumstances under which we live now,' he answered. 'The old proverb—a toad under a harrow—was once thought to be strange and unusual. I know now we have each a harrow, and perhaps we are all toads! *I feel like one.*'

If Elgar felt like a toad, he never behaved like one. That he was still living and loving was a comfort; for when a man is in his 'sixties' there are not so many friends as there were. 1931 had brought a keen grief in the death of Melba. She herself, on her last visit to Covent Garden, had said, "'This place is full of ghosts—Harry Higgins, Gladys Ripon, Caruso, Neil Forsyth—they have all gone, and I shall never be here again.'" Then she broke down and wept inconsolably.' Percy Pitt had also his sad list—such a list as we all make as age draws on—'Caruso, Destinn, Plançon, Hans Richter, Mancinelli, Messenger, Harry Higgins, Neil Forsyth.' They had belonged to the golden age of his life: the age when hope has already achievement to support it, and when achievement has not yet left hope behind: the hour when the shadows are shortest.

In January of that year, 1931, he had written in his diary a quotation from Anne Thakeray Ritchie: 'I like to think that death doesn't so much matter—that one goes on loving and understanding the dead just as one does the living, and that long after one is gone one will still be alive in the hearts of those one loves, and come back at times with a strange sympathy.' No one, not one of those dearest to him, knew then how much he was necessarily preoccupied with the thought of following those friends who had already gone home. He owned to a pain at times;

it was called neuritis. But his doctor had warned him that he was suffering from angina pectoris, and that he must take life easy, and above all must not conduct. Conducting involved physical and nervous strain of the most dangerous kind. He could not take that advice : not only because he must earn, or live on his wife's earnings. The reserve of a lifetime had grown so deep, that he *could not* resolve upon the confession that he was seriously ill, could not face so much of the limelight as was involved in having people anxious about him. That anyone should even look at him with concern—his inmost nature rose up to forbid it. And if he was not ill, how could he turn down engagements, or refuse exertions, or take a cab instead of walking ?

A move in September, 1932, to 19 Eton Villas, Hampstead, was troublesome in itself and achieved with trouble.

Every move involved the complete moving of all his opera scores. They were usually labelled and put down one by one, each packet against the particular bookshelf where it belonged, and then only had to be unpacked and put straight in ; but the last move, the carriers turned everything out on the floor higgledy-piggledy. He went in and saw the mess and wept over it, because he was terribly busy at the time and it meant hours of unnecessary sorting, and as he was conducting all kinds of concerts at that time, it meant hanging up everything while he hunted for the scores.

About the same time it was suggested that he should write his memoirs. The offer was tempting ; but he hesitated. It seemed, to his friends' surprise, as though he had a superstitious feeling about it ; if

he were to undertake it, he said, he should not live to complete it. The feeling was not superstition. His days were 'terribly busy,' and the writing would have to be done in his rest time. But eventually he did begin dictating it.

The first chapters were still in the rough, when the B.B.C. celebrated its 'birthday week,' in November, 1932. On the Friday in that week, the 18th, Percy Pitt conducted Haydn's *Creation*. On Tuesday he went to the B.B.C. to discuss the programme for the next Friday. That night he sat down and played to his family, a thing he very seldom did. He played Tchaikovsky—it was among his favourite music : the little part, among other things, which he used to play on the celesta in early days at Queen's Hall. He went to bed well ; but in the night he said he felt ill, and complained of pain in his arm. Even then no one knew its significance. After taking some brandy he seemed to settle down. In the morning Mrs. Pitt, looking in gaily to triumph in having won the morning scramble for the first bath, found him lying dead.

'Unbelievably, he was sixty-two.'

He was buried in Hampstead Cemetery, and a memorial service followed at All Souls', Loudoun Road. Maggie Teyte sang Verdi's *Ave Maria*. Dennis Noble sang Sullivan's *Thou art passing hence, my brother*—and no apter elegy could have sounded over the grave of Percy Pitt. It was as a brother, indeed, that he was mourned whose help had always been so ready, whose tranquil kindness had always been so reliable, whose gentle gift of living had given to the places where he was to be met something of the

security of home. 'I don't know what I shall do without his letters,' wrote desolately an ex-soldier, crippled by the War, to whom he used to write every week about the music which was going to be given on the wireless.

The Third Meeting of the Opera Circle which he had founded was dedicated to his memory ; in March, 1933, the Circle organized a Memorial Concert in Broadcasting House. The B.B.C. itself published an obituary notice, and on the anniversary of his death gave a short programme of his works. In September of that year a tablet was unveiled at All Souls'.

He left property valued at £31.

Percy Pitt was no more one of the giants of the human race, than he was one of its millionaires. Those who thought he was less a musician than an administrator were mistaken. He was a musician all through : as fine and pure and sincere as the best of them. It was a matter of power, not of quality ; if his sweet pipe was not the thundering tone of the great masters, it was because, like all but a few of mankind, he lacked, not music, but the gigantic dynamic force of soul which we call genius. Force of soul he had, of which both his own compositions and his conducting afforded now and then a startling glimpse ; but not such as to break the curbs imposed upon it : letting itself be divined chiefly in the perfection of the lesser work he gave it to do. What he most often gave the world in his compositions was that delicacy and delightfulness in smaller things, which the mediæval craftsmen-artists gave to the ordinary utensils of the home. He gave that also

in his conducting ; under his baton not only masterpieces were loyally interpreted, 'so that nothing comes between you and the composer,' but light music also was honoured and at its best. Just so his life, without tremendous effects, moved to the beneficent rhythms of kindness and order. That it was happy, on the whole, does not mean that it was always easy. The true sources of happiness are so easily overgrown with falsehood that they are never reached without spiritual effort. Nor does any man ever deserve the name of a helper who has not forgone some wishes of his own.

It does us good sometimes to read about those who have achieved life's mightiest possibilities, who have climbed or leapt to the most dazzling heights of success and fame ; but as, for the most part, we shall not be among their number, it does us good also to read of lives with gifts in part unrecognized, with ambitions in part unfulfilled, but working quietly towards the same great ends, and fruitful perhaps far beyond their own knowledge. 'I hope you realize, that it has all been jolly well worth while.'

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